



Personal History William Wasden Jr.

William Hiłamas Edward Wasden Jr. Waxawidi “Canoes Come to His Shore” was born at 'Yalis (Alert Bay) British Columbia on October 14, 1967. William is a member of the 'Nāmgis Nation “Nimkish Valley Tribe”. William was always fascinated with the artwork and style of his Kwakwaka'wakw “The Kwakwala Speaking People” (a term now accepted to embrace the 18 existing tribes). He also belongs to many other respective tribes within the Kwakwaka'wakw.

William's father is William Wasden Sr. known as Bill, who is of English and Irish descent and also part Kwagu't from Tsaxis “Fort Rupert” and 'Nāmgis in heritage. Bill's traditional name is Sibaxola “Sound of Copper Ringing” which was given to him by his wife's family. William's mother is Janet Wasden nee Hunt and her traditional name is Pudtas “Food Giver”. Janet is a member of the Kwagu't and 'Nāmgis Nations.

On William's father's side, he is a direct descendant of Hereditary Chiefs John 'Nulis of the 'Ma'āmtagila Kwagu't and “Old” Chief Wanukw of the 'Wawaliba'yi 'Walas Kwagu't. On William's mother's side, he is a direct descendant from the Hereditary Chiefs “Old” Ttakwudtas Tsitsa'walagama'yi 'Nāmgis and Waxawidi aka Samuel Innis of the Gigilgam 'Nāmgis.

William carries many names and dances that have been bestowed on him by various sides of his families. He is a member of the most sacred 'Mama'ka “Shaman Dance Society” and Hamatsa “Cannibal Dance Society”, among others. William is also a descendant of the Cook, Wanukw, Hunt, Alfred, Harris and Innis families. He can also trace his ancestry to the Tlingit of Alaska and the Mowachaht of the West Coast.

Art History

Starting at a very young age, William has designed traditional button blankets with his mother Janet and numerous blankets and aprons for families among the Kwakwaka'wakw. He has had the wonderful learning opportunity to work on blankets with his sister (cousin) Maxine Matilpi who is world-renowned for her sewing creations. William is also experienced at working with cedar bark and has had the privilege to work with cousins Donna Cranmer and Johnathan Henderson, both experts among the nation.

At Alert Bay, when William was 12, his mother Janet Wasden nee Hunt, enrolled him into Chief and Master Carver Pał'nakwalagilis Wakas Douglas Cranmer's art classes. William acknowledges Doug as his first traditional teacher and the major inspiration for his present style and art teachings.

Later in his teen years, William came under the inspiration of his cousin Beau Dick, Beau made William his first carving knife and continues to awe inspire him through his ingenious artwork.

In his high school years, William attended Haida artist Don Yeoman's native art classes at Victoria High School. Chosen by Don, William received the Henry Hunt Memorial award for artistic achievement. William is grateful to Don for taking his artwork to its next level and encouraging a journey into “personal style”. After completing high school, William occasionally visited at the "Arts of the Raven Gallery" carving shed in Victoria and furthered his learning of carving and art with many of his extended Hunt Family.

In the late 1990's, William began silver jewelry engraving with his uncle Paddy Seaweed and enjoyed the medium but was heavily influenced to move towards and immerse himself into the singing aspect of his people's culture.

Traditional Song and History Training

William attended Alert Bay Jr. Secondary Cultural Dance Classes with Singer/Composer/Chief Țasudis'nala Jack Peters, Elders Harry Scow, Ethel Alfred, Vera Newman and Stella Beans. William was inspired to start singing seriously through his brother (cousin) Patrick Hunt after being encouraged to visit Patrick's grandfather Singer/Composer/Chief YaȚawa 'Nagedzi Thomas Hunt. "Uncle" Tommy began to sing for the two boys and William's heart was moved so much that he decided to redirect his energy from artwork to singing with hopes of preserving the dying tradition.

At the age of 19, William had the fortunate opportunity to meet the last Kwakwaka'wakw Song Keeper/Composer/Historian Chief Hiwakilis Tom Willie known as "Mackenzie" and his wife Matriarch 'Mlidi Elsie nee Wamiss daughter of Chief Helagilis Tom "Patch" Wamiss. Both teachers came from the Musga'makw Dzawada'enuxw "The Four United Tribes of Kingcome Inlet". At their first meeting, Chief Hiwakilis connected himself in terms of blood relation and sang one song to test William's interest level, William learned the song over night and sang the song back to him the next day. From this connection, a four-year song and history training began. Gaga "Granny" Elsie was the translator and transcriber who explained and translated the ancient history and songs being taught. From his mentors, William learned how to compose proper traditional songs along with numerous traditional songs from many tribes amongst the Kwakwaka'wakw. After the sad passing of both teachers, William continues to learn from recordings and present day knowledge that remains in Kwakwaka'wakw villages. William is forever grateful and credits these two amazing Elders for their vision to teach singing when it had almost faded away, building the foundation that has made the singing of the Kwakwaka'wakw what it is today.

William has taught most of his adult life in the majority of schools in the unceded Kwakwaka'wakw territories. William's retirement was at Ka'utlats "House of Learning", a 1st Nation's School at Quatsino BC as the Cultural Coordinator. He also ventures to share his knowledge of song composition with other nations along the coast.

Dance Group Coordinator

William continues to teach all that he knows to the next generation of Kwakwaka'wakw. For many years, William led for the Gwa'wina Dancers Cultural Society, an adult professional dance group whose intention was to share authentic Kwakwaka'wakw culture and teachings. For many years, William has worked at the U'mista Cultural Center at Alert Bay BC as a researcher and cultural advisor. Recently, he has been rehired to return and continue work in language and history documentation for the Kwakwaka'wakw Nation.