

## GWAGANAD (DIANE BROWN) SPEAKING IN THE HAIDA WAY

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*The text given here was spoken by the author in the Supreme Court of British Columbia, Canada, during a Hearing in which 72 Haida from Haida Gwaii, the Queen Charlotte Islands (off the North West Coast of Canada), were accused of breaking an injunction to prohibit picketing of logging roads into their traditional territory. A land claim was pending on this territory, and clearcut logging was destroying the cultural base of the Haida Nation, the food on which its traditions relied.*

*Diane Brown spoke freely in this court, unconstrained by the rules of evidence which the Judge, Harry McKay, had waived for the occasion, allowing the Haida to use traditional modes of oratory and ceremony. Thus the text gives an unmediated eloquence which is otherwise often lost when Native Persons speak in public contexts defined by Whites.*

*The text forms part of a longer collaborative work-in-progress, Walking-Around-Eating, in which Diane Brown and Vancouver writer and researcher Norbert Ruebsaat attempt to give meaning to the struggle for land, and talk specifically about the relation between food and spirit in the current Haida lexicon.*

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*Kilsli, Kilsligana, Kiljadgana, Taaxwilaas. Your Honour, chiefs, ladies held in high esteem, friends. I thank you for this opportunity to speak today. I was aware that I could get a lawyer, but I feel you lose if you go through another person.*

*My first language is Haida. My second language is English. Therefore I can express myself better in English. I feel through another person, a lawyer, they also speak another language, and I would have lost what I hope to help Kilsli understand and feel.*

Since the beginning of time — I have been told this through our oral stories — since the beginning of time the Haidas have been on the Queen Charlotte Islands.

That was our place, given to us.

We were put on the islands as caretakers of this land.

Approximately 200 years ago foreigners came to that land. The Haida are very hospitable people. The people came. They were welcomed. We shared. They told us that perhaps there is a better way to live, a different religion, education in schools. The Haida tried this way. The potlatches were outlawed. In many schools my father attended in Kokalitza, the Haida language was not allowed to be spoken. He was punished if he used his language. To this day, Watson Pryce, my father, understands every word of the Haida language, but he doesn't speak it.

So the people came. We tried their way. Their language. Their education. Their way of worship. It is clear to me that they are not managing our lands well. If this continues, there will be nothing left for my children and my grandchildren to come. I feel that the people governing us should give us a chance to manage the land the way we know how it should be.

It seems that the other cultures don't see trees. They see money. That's not the way it is in my mind. It's take and take and take from the earth.

On Lyell Island — I want to address Lyell Island and South Moresby, the injunction being served on us. I want to say why that concerns me. To me it is a home of our ancestors. As Lily stated, our ancestors are still there. It is my childhood. Every spring come March my father and mother would take me down to Burnaby Narrows. We stayed there till June. It's wonderful memories I had. I am thankful to my parents for bringing me up the traditional way. There was concern on the Indian agent's part that I missed too much school. But how can you tell them that I was at school?

Because of that upbringing, because I was brought down to Lyell Island area, Burnaby Narrows and living off the land, I feel — that's why I feel the way I do about my culture and the land.

In those early years the first lesson in my life that I remember is respect. I was taught to respect the land. I was taught to respect the food that comes from the land. I was taught that everything had a meaning. Every insect had a meaning and none of those things were to be held lightly. The food was never to be taken for granted. In gathering the food, it's what — the nearest I can translate I can say to gather food is a spiritual experience for me.

I want to touch now on another very important area in my life as a food gatherer. It is my job, my purpose, to ensure that I gather certain foods for my husband and my children, and I want to share one part. It's called k'aaw. That's herring-roe on kelp. In the spring the herring come and they spawn on kelp. For many years now I have been harvesting that and putting it away for the winter. But so far I haven't heard what — why is food gathering spiritual?

It's a spiritual thing that happens. It doesn't just happen every year. You can't take that for granted. We can't take that for granted because everything in the environment has to be perfect. The climate has to be perfect, the water temperature, the kelp have to be ready and the herring have to want to spawn.

But I want to share what goes on in my spiritual self in my body come February. And I feel it's an important point. That's what makes me as a Haida different from you, Kilsli. My body feels that it's time to spawn. It gets ready in February. I get a longing to be on the sea. I constantly watch the ocean surrounding the island where the herring spawn. My body is kind of on edge in anticipation.

Finally the day comes when it spawns the water gets all milky around it. I know I am supposed to speak for myself, but I share this experience with all the friends, the lady friends, that we pick together this wonderful feeling on the day that it happens, the excitement, the relief that the herring did indeed come this year. And you don't quite feel complete until you are right out on the ocean with your hands in the water harvesting the kelp, the roe on kelp, and then your body feels right. That cycle is complete.

And it's not quite perfect until you eat your first batch of herring roe on kelp. I don't know how to say it well, but your body almost rejoices in that first feed. It feels right. If you listen to your body it tells you a lot of things. If you put something wrong in it, your body feels it. If you put something right in it, your body feels it. Your spiritual self feels it. In order to make me complete I need the right food from the land. I also need to prepare it myself. I have to harvest it myself. The same thing goes for fish, the fish that we gather for the winter. But I wanted to elaborate on the harvesting of kelp to give you an idea of how it feels as a Haida to harvest food.

So I want to stress that it's the land that helps us maintain our culture. It is an important part of our culture. Without that land, I fear very much for the future of the Haida nation. Like I said before, I don't want my children to inherit stumps. I want my children and my grandchildren to grow up with pride and dignity as a member of the

Haida nation. I fear that if we take that land that we may lose the dignity and the pride of being a Haida. Without that there is no — there is no way that I can see that we could carry on with pride and dignity. I feel very strongly — that's why I came down to express my concern for my children and grandchildren.

So today, if that injunction goes through and the logging continues — and there is a saying up there, they say, "Log it to the beach". Then what? What will be left and who will be left? We can't go anywhere else but the Island.

I study a lot about our brothers on the mainland, the North American Plains Indians in their history. They moved a lot because they were forced to. Some moved north, south east west, back up against the mountains and back again.

We as Haida people can't move anymore west. We can go over into the ocean is all. So when the logging is gone, is done, if it goes through and there is stumps left, the loggers will have gone and we will be there as we have been since the beginning of time. Left with very little to work with as a people.

Again I want to thank you, Kilsli, for this opportunity to speak and share my culture. Thank you very much.

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## GWAGANAD (DIANE BROWN) & NORBERT RUEBSAAT THE SKY AND THE SEA JOINED TOGETHER: EXCERPTS FROM WALKING- AROUND-EATING

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### INTRODUCTION

*Given here are excerpts from a text-in-progress called Walking-Around-Eating, a collaborative work by Gwaganad (Diane Brown), a Haida woman living on Haida Gwaii (Queen Charlotte Islands), and myself, Norbert Ruebsaat, an immigrant Canadian of German descent living in Vancouver. The work attempts to understand the relationship between eating and spirituality from our two cultural perspectives. I first came across Diane's work while reading transcripts of the November 1985 B.C. Supreme Court Hearings, in which the Haida gave testimony defending their right to protect homelands threatened by logging. I decided I wanted to learn more about the Haida meaning of homeland because I wanted to understand who I was as an immigrant European who had never negotiated with the original owners for the right to live in this land. Diane's testimony, in which she describes gathering and eating k'aaw — herring-roe on kelp — made a connection between food and spirit that I had never heard made before. It was eloquent and transforming. I wanted to know more about the bond between eating and the spirituality of which Diane spoke, because her words suggested a continuity between instances that for us Europeans had been severed at some point in our collective past.*

*I travelled to Haida Gwaii, at Diane's invitation, and spent two-and-a-half months talking with her, taking notes and experiencing the places she showed me. The text given here is excerpted from our tape-recorded conversations, and from my journals. It is an initial working*