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.



GWAGANAD (DIANE BROWN) & NORBERT RUEBSAAT

# THE SKY AND THE SEA JOINED TOGETHER: EXCERPTS FROM WALKING-AROUND-EATING

## 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.*

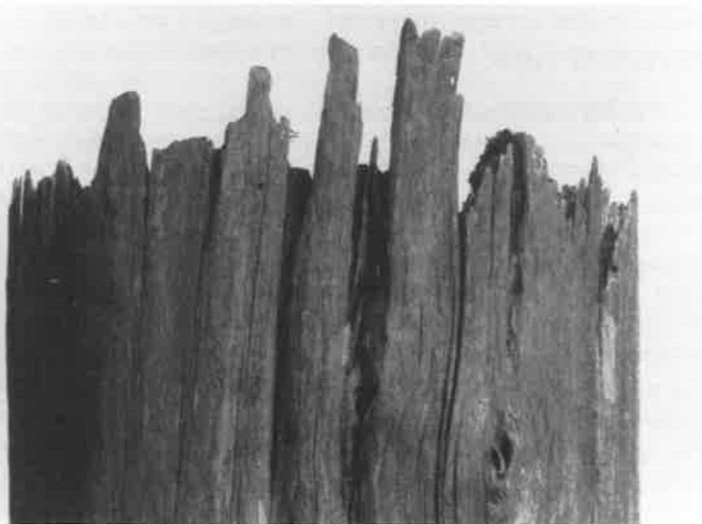
*I travelled to Haida Gwaii, at Diane's invitation, and spent two-and-a-half months talking with her, taking notes and experiencing the places she showed me. The text given here is excerpted from our tape-recorded conversations, and from my journals. It is an initial working*

*of material that will eventually take the form of a book. I differentiate our two voices by printing Diane's in italic and mine in regular face. Diane's way of teaching, which she learned from her elders, teachers, is oral and process oriented. I realised that learning from her was a matter of listening to and reflecting on her words, and also experiencing and reflecting on things she told me to do. I hope the text will show the process of my learning, as it respects the process of her teaching.*

*I would like to thank Watson Pryce, Diane's father, for allowing us to use one of his brother's traditional names as the title for this piece.*

*Diane thanks ... "my ancestors, because it's amazing that we're even here. From over 10,000 Haida we were reduced to 500 by the smallpox in the nineteenth century, and those of us that have survived, I believe survived for a purpose — that purpose being to take care of the earth".*

* * *



## TAAKAADAA

So what's the name of the knife you use?

*Taakaadaa. Dull, my husband, made it for me. Years ago. So I taught myself on that.*

*But hardly anyone uses them anymore. They all learn it with knives.*

*I have real ancient ones from my great great grandmother, but I can't use them. I can, I suppose, if I was desperate. But your hand kind*





*of grows on this one. It's the handle. I just make a mess out of the fish with the other ones.*

*I only split the back with this one. I make the ts'iilji, the dry strips, with a regular knife.*

*Taakaadaa. I don't know how to translate it. Splitter.*

It looks like a half-moon, ancient. A large metal eye, drowsy, half closed. The slate coloured blade is wedged along its upper straight edge into a split alder branch, bound at each end with fine wire. The handle is worn smooth from years of use, and it seems like a human thing, an extension of the hand, rather than of nature.

*When I was little, too, I had a tiny taakaadaa. It was for a certain kind of bird, but it was only this big.*

*I wish I knew where it was to this day.*

*And when I first found it I was amazed they built me one like that to cut fish. I thought they were so thoughtful. And I used to go and catch minnows and take them home and practice.*

*And they would let me cut a little trout or something when they caught fish. I could practice on that.*

*I found out later it was a special knife for cutting little birds. I was digging around and I found a taakaadaa that was very small, and I thought it was special for me. Years later I found out it was for a bird.*

*But I wish I had kept that knife.*

Diane holds the *taakaadaa* in her right hand and strokes the blueback from its head to its tail with her left. It lies on the cutting board, a piece of burlap placed underneath to keep the fish from sliding. She strokes it slowly and deliberately, along its entire length, applying pressure, as if she were stroking a cat, or smoothing a piece of cloth on an ironing board. As she does this she bends over the fish and seems to whisper to it.

*Lily, my mother-in-law, Dull and them's mum, taught me how to fix fish. Nine years I apprenticed with her. She's the one.*

*I couldn't learn well under my dad's wife, Sarah. She was too — she just blew me away, she was so good.*

*And I could never be as good as Lily.*

*So when we broke away from Lily and moved into our own cabin and had our own net and our own fish and everything, I developed my own style, out of what she taught me.*

*I was too intimidated. I wanted to be as good as them, and I never could.*

*So I do my fish different. The old style is different, and harder. I couldn't master that, not in nine years.*

I'm not watching as the *taakaadaa* enters the fish, but I hear it: a sharp hiss as the blade breaks the skin and runs a straight line along the backbone, snug by the dorsal fin. Light dances between the blade and the salmon's silver skin. Diane is still hunched over, murmuring to the fish and stroking it as she cuts. The *taakaadaa* makes repeated arced slices, blade catching the light, as she gradually separates the rich red flesh from the backbone. As Diane angles the knife up and lifts the meat away, I see the blueback's skeleton, white and spidery — a delicate claw that, in life, held the fish's body in its grasp.

## SG'AAWGN

*Another time I remember, Lauren, my daughter, and I went and got salmon berries. I hadn't done that in ages. But the best time I had there was — my dad was cutting wood down the coast. My mother couldn't get out of the car by then, I guess she was too sick. And she would give me a milk can. Seemed big then, but a milk can with holes in it, and with a string right around your neck. She told me to go pick some berries. And I went in the bush, and like you would just stay on the side of the road because of bears and whatever else. She didn't spare for the scary stories either. I think it was she told the Slytut story, where Slytut sucks your bones dry. Or where it eats your flesh and all that's left of you is your bleached bones in the morning. The only thing left on this earth.*

*Anyway, so there's all these things going through my mind, but I got brave and I ducked under some bushes. I don't know how old I was, maybe six, seven. I went in and there they were, huge sg'aawgan, orange and red, and I just had to reach up and pick them. They were so huge it just took a little while to fill your can. That thinking about scary stories left me as soon as I saw those berries.*

*I duck in out of the sunlight, and the branches swing down again, enclosing me. I am held in the body of the bush. I feel suddenly that I have been in this place before, the green light filtering through, down from what seems a vast ceiling which is in fact only inches above my head. The ceiling comes closer and seems to flee from me at the same moment — and the memory is one of fleeing Gothic arches from the cathedrals of my very early childhood.*

*It takes me a while to adjust and realise it is the swinging of the branches, disturbed by my entry, that cause this vertigo.*

*And they'd just, plop into your can, and within minutes I had this can full to the top. And she was all amazed at the bigness of them and the goodness of them. They all taste different.*

*And she would say stuff in Haida, maybe how fortunate she was to have me in her life to bring her these berries. And she'd say, here I am this sick old suffering woman blessed with this child bringing me food. She was trying to say how glad she was she adopted me. And then in the next breath she would say how she was going from me.*

*She knew she wasn't going to be long. And so I got all this knowledge crammed into me in the first nine years of my life.*

*Of course I didn't want to hear that, that she was going. But maybe she taught me that too — that it was part of life to have to die.*

Two types of salmon berries: red ones which cluster around the central cone like blood drops, and light amber ones which look like globes of light. I ask around to find out if they are male and female of the same species, or whether they are different species, but nobody knows or wants to tell me. They grow on the same kind of bush, but never together on the same bush. When you pick them the clustered berries drop freely into your hand, and the tiny white prickly cones around which they were gathered stand exposed.

*And I'd even forgotten that until Lauren and I went out. We went down the coast. We were picking on the side of the road, and she tasted them, and they weren't good. And I'd remember picking them, and how good they were. So I tasted these and they were bitter. And we got to talking and said they were probably sprayed with herbicide or something. So we took off from there.*

*That was such a good feeling, picking with my daughter. Just like it is if we work on fish together. But I hadn't seen her picking berries before. I'd sent her out, but I'd been missing out all these years. It felt really really good. I haven't seen a more beautiful sight for a long time, than seeing my daughter picking berries.*

*Every mother thinks her daughter is the most beautiful, you know, that's nothing new. But the feeling I had watching her picking berries was indescribable.*

And then she took me to her place. And I think when somebody takes you to their places, where they've found something, it's a special sharing. And it's within the village. And we went and we found just these huge berries.

I walk through Skidegate and occasionally stop to pick the salmon berries which cluster and bunch out over the road. I am aware of eyes on me as I pick. The eyes come from inside the village houses, and I wonder if I am infringing on rights, territory, ownership. In Kinnaird, where I grew up, land was private and you were punished for stealing. I had to go and apologise to Mrs Musselman for stealing raspberries that hung out, like these do, over her fence.

Here I am a white man gathering Native berries.

We filled our ice cream buckets in a real little while. They tasted just right.

So next will be huckleberries and blueberries. I always get a few of them, but I eat them, I don't put them up.

Even — that's one thing I did even after my mother died — my grandmother would send us up to pick. Then all those scary berry stories would come to mind.

* * *

### TSIXUU JIING 'UAAN GAU

It's so exciting. You know when it's high tide. You're getting all pumped up, as you will, before low tide. And then you're right on the beach digging around it's so exciting. We try looking at an almost different spot every low tide.

It's sort of a mental preparation, an anticipation and mental preparation

But it's so exciting because the low tide's just there for a little while. You're never going to get that moment again, ever. And if you want the food that it provides there's a bit of ... frantic feeling because you're fighting such a big thing. I damn near got brushed off the rock this morning. That's how fast it whooshes in. It was fine when I jumped on the rocks.

The tide has impeccable timing.

I see her walking down the beach away from me — blue polyester pile jacket, yellow gumboots, black sweatpants, her footsteps crunching in the gravel. The green bucket dangles from one hand, and she holds a

small crowbar in the other. She moves toward the point where earlier she told me the shaman lived — slightly away and down from the village, out by the point.

And you really don't want it to end because there's no time in your life when you could really duplicate that feeling. There's nothing else that compares to it, even remotely. And you don't want it to end, even though you know it is.

She looks like a little girl going off exploring, I suddenly think. I remember the first time I came to the West Coast and encountered the ocean. I was ten or eleven. I saw the low tide in the morning, got a small bucket and a stick, and went out on the opened flats. The pools stared back at me like eyes. The exposed flat ground seemed to me to be the whole eye of God looking up at me: looking down from the sky at me, and then up again at me in all these pools. All the things I found on the beach that morning were the things that God saw and was showing me through his eyes.

It's exciting. And everything you find is such a gift.

She pries the large chitons, limpets, abalones off the rocks with her crowbar and drops them in the bucket. I imagine her doing this as I write. She lifts the blades of kelp back carefully with her hand, then smooths them down again. Talks to them.

But I wouldn't go with any other bucket. We found that bucket on Gospel Island. There was a wreck. And Dull put handles on it.

A green bucket, the bottom of a plastic garbage pail. Grooves up the side; a hole cut in each side, and a piece of yellow rope strung through, knotted at the ends. I see it later standing on the deck of the Hai Yu, Diane and Dull's boat. The bucket's full of sea urchins, *guudangi*, their spines scraping against the sides, making an unearthly sound.

And it wouldn't be right if I used another one. It would be easier to get a smaller one. But it wouldn't feel right — just as it wouldn't feel right to go out food gathering with anyone else but Dull.

She bends over, looking beneath a rock: the bucket stands a short distance away: a thing held in the sun. It casts an oblong shadow on the rocks. A distant thing that is also close.

I always feel or try to imagine what it was like two hundred years ago, gathering food. It's certainly a magical time, that low tide. Zero tide's the most exciting. You get way longer to look around. It goes lower so you can look further out.

In the old days they didn't even have to look very hard. There was so much. They could be selective. They could choose by certain colours, for example.





And then it's all over and you're just exhausted. You're just barely making it back up the beach, you know — what drove you? And all those big slippery rocks, slipping on the kelp, bending over and lugging that big bucket.

I see her crashed out on a log. She lies face down, and her body seems to join the log. They are connected at the stomach. Her head is cradled in her arms and turned away from me. She still has the blue pile jacket on. The toes of her gumboots trail down either side of the grainy wood.

Her body goes over into the log and the log goes over into the beach, and together they become a thing the tide has washed up.

Like in a child's song: there's a hole in the bottom of the sea where these two came from.

Yeah, I was knocked out from that guudangi. I loved the walk in from the point where you went last. A little grove of cedar — was like a house in there.

She had told me to explore the point, where the shamans lived, and from the rocks at the end of which she had gathered food. There are some bones still in there, she said — and I imagined the shaman, crumbling up, very suddenly, dying, turning magically into bones. The place that had been him — he's sitting, say, meditating, looking out to sea from his point of land, and then back to the village, connecting those two points with his eyes — this place that is him, this vantage point then turn suddenly into bones.

Transformed by the power of that seeing, is the way I imagine it, and in this way altering time.

I go to the place she mentioned, the little house beneath the cedars, and I don't see the bones, but I see a deer, a buck, with small antlers, which keeps me in its line of sight and scent as it stays just far enough away so I can't touch it. We stalk each other in this way, tracing lines, angles, patterns of sight across the small wooded point.

Later I go into Cumshewa village, which is back, away from the point, and stumble upon the bones: a small pile, curled up neatly, foetally, beneath the broken mortuary pole. A spruce grows up through the centre of the pole and a direct line of sight connects the bones, the broken funeral box atop the slanting pole, and the farthest reach of shaman point where Diane gathered food.

If I can't get out, and there's a zero tide, I'm right nuts. You know when it's coming, you know when it's there, and you know when it's over. You just do.

I don't know what makes it like that.

The shaman's house was a cedar tree, low, the branches forming a skirt which touched the ground. When you looked back from this point along the tongue of land which joined it to the village site, you saw the mortuary pole, spruce growing through, the bones lying neatly beneath.

And then the minute you feel the wind change, you hear the waves talking different, then there's a stillness, and then — whoosh! Comes in real fast. You've had your turn. Now get out.

Tears come as I stand looking at the bones. I don't know where they come from. They overpower me, and I start to shake. They come from an entirely different place than my tears usually know.

I gave you whatever I wanted you to have, so leave now.

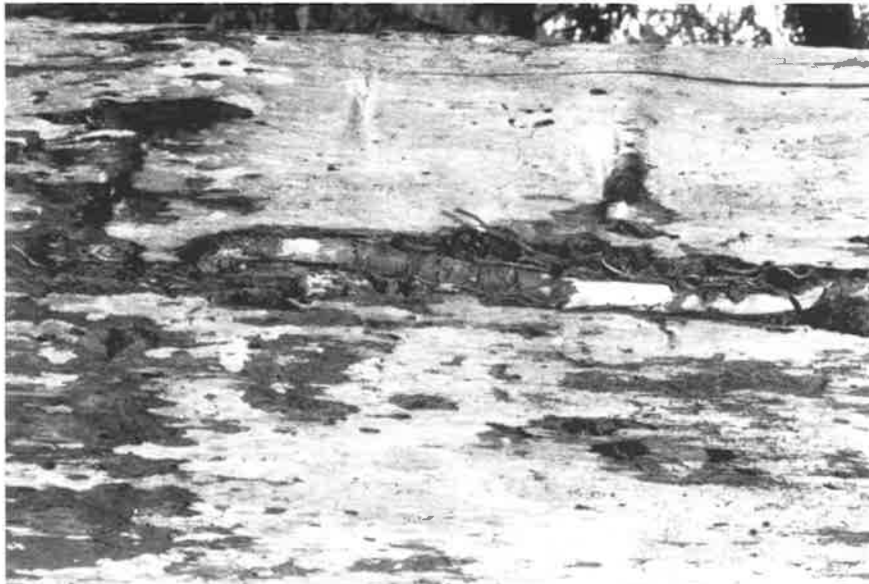
She looks out, to the point, to that tip just beyond the point where the tide touches the rocks. Her eyes hold that place.

Sea's a powerful thing. The oldest thing on this earth. It's forever.

I see her there, gathering urchins, abalone, chitons, and I see her here, talking to me.

When we travel to catch the low tide, my heart's just pounding by the time we get out there.

Yeah, because I can feel it when it's low. All of a sudden in the morning you just wake right up and feel it. And you look out and sure enough.







* * *

## GALAATLHAAN

Must have been hard on the old people to lose that traditional food, eh?

I always hear them wishing for a certain food. If it's within my power — like sea urchins, I can go to the West Coast and bring them some.

I take my diving suit, mask, snorkel, fins. I dive down. The bottom is covered in urchins, guudangi, kelp, anemones, bunched mussels. The urchins look like burrs thrown down on a piece of rough cloth.

Abalone. I'd have to come all the way down here, and then it's doubtful whether I'd even find any. If you dive you can get them.

I've brought my diving gear along. I'll go down and get some for them. I go down and look around. The sea, the rocks, the moving beds of kelp, seem very close, almost brushing against the glass of my diving mask. It's as if everything has been turned around and I am in an inverted world, my feet hanging above me.

Or on zero tide. And last time — oh, what a trip. I'll never forget it. We were down last week, or a week and a half ago, and we don't reveal anymore where we get them, because it gets to be our little spot.

How many do you want? I ask Diane. The abalone, galaatlhaan, are suddenly everywhere, whereas before I could see none. It is as if they had to find me, study me, before they would reveal themselves. Then their eyelids slowly opened. Rock eyes. Ten, she says.

If you find them on the tide — figure the tide stays out for an hour, so you got an hour to find whatever you want to find. And we don't know all the abalone spots. And we went around the island to a place we don't usually look.

The sea bottom slopes away gently here, terraced to the green-brown depths. I can see twenty feet. I can lie on the top and try to remember the spot where, on the last breath, I saw the galaatlhaan, and did not have the breath to pry it loose with my knife. The waves toss me. The galaatlhaan stays with its brothers.

We pulled up and I got off the boat because there was a big one hanging right off the rock. You could see it.

I don't know whether this is the same spot they have taken me to.

So I jumped out with my bucket, Dull took off, and I lifted the kelp, and there were like three abalone hanging off the rock.

Lose desire, I say to myself. I desire to lose my desire. The one that is too far away is too deep: it doesn't want me and doesn't know me. I surface frantically, gasping for breath, almost passing out.

They were all relaxed, poor things. And now they're going to get pried off and cut up and eaten.

A skirt. They move on a skirt of flesh — speckled, black and white filigrees that frill out from beneath the hard grey shell as it moves along. They float on these skirts, like stone ballerinas with no feet.

I couldn't believe I could get three without just slipping and sweating and falling all over. Getting half a dozen — I got two dozen, that's the most I ever seen. And they were all big.

Two to eight inches across. The legal size is four. They fill the palm of a hand, like a stone for throwing. Underneath, the single foot, like a snail's foot, is soft and amber. When you touch it it curls around, inward, like a contracting vulva.

My dad was there. Lily. And Kate and Jerron. They all came along.

I pry them loose from the bottom, rush up to the air, drop them with a clunk into the back of the dinghy, which Dull is rowing, backwards, towards me. Later I see them crawling around the fiberglass dinghy bottom: large snails, their shells peaked on their backs like stone sails.

Anyway, we left shore and came back to the boat, Dull and I and my dad and Kate and Jarron were there, and usually you get just enough to fry up, you know, two, three a piece if you're lucky. But the bucket was full, and we got off on here, and Lily and my dad started eating them raw.

You take the knife, and you scrape it along the inside of the shell, cutting the muscle. The knife makes a sharp squeaking sound as it edges the silvery shell lining — which reflects the sky. The abalone is a miniature of the sky, which you hold in your palm and tilt upward to catch the light as the meat falls away to your dish.

You thank the sky.

And we couldn't quit, we just kept cutting and cutting and eating them raw — it was just knowing there was so much.

And we weren't talking, we were just sitting in the sun eating, silently eating for a while. And then there's this Haida saying — "To eat your voices away". And we said that and started laughing.

Raw, they are pungent, leathery. They break almost like candy in your mouth, and then seem to melt. Like eating the sky's muscles, I think.

Usually you can't afford the luxury of eating them raw, and that's how we prefer it, right?

Like eating God's meat raw.

We like it like that, anyway. But you just slice it real thin, and eat it right on the spot.





The knife knows where to go. The meat/muscle pulls together, quivers ever so slightly, alive as you cut it, and then relaxes, gives itself.

* * *

We were at Skedans before anyone was around one time. Dull and I. We went out on a little boat. We camped there because it was zero tide.

He loves to explore. His goal is to explore every little piece of the island almost. Up North, on the West Coast.

Because it was zero tide we took off.

That morning we didn't even eat breakfast because we almost slept in.

You go before low tide.

We took off and we ate sea urchins for breakfast. Had the clams for lunch. And we ate abalone and scallops for supper.

She breaks off and looks out the Hai Yu's cabin window.

Hey, there's a mud shark, right on the surface.

Where, I don't see it.

Was it small or big?

I was sitting on the porch at Skedans after supper when, for whatever reason, I got a clear picture of a big sailing ship. I was looking at the horizon, and I saw this ship. It felt like it was the first ship the Skedans people ever saw.

I got a frightened feeling, like how our ancestors must have felt.

According to reports, the Haida conjectured that the first European sailing ships they saw might be floating islands. They thought this because of the masts and bowsprits, which poked above the horizon ahead of the ship. They thought these might be dead trees.

There is a way of looking at islands here, and along the entire West Coast, that lend credence to this theory. The islands, when I look at them with my European eyes, look like small ships perched on the lip of the horizon.

They are in that oscillation of light which cuts the horizon away from the earth, then stitches the two places together again like a doctor. You observe this work of light on certain types of days.

The Haida found it odd and memorable, however, that these islands should be populated only by men and teenage boys. Where are all your women? they asked, incredulous. They didn't know how these beings replenished themselves.

The other thing they found odd, and finally magical, was that these islands seemed to consist entirely of man-made things. It was as if

nothing existed that had not been wrought by hands. This hypnotised the Haida, who knew art: the copper, iron, brass, pulled at their eyes.

As soon as that picture came, I made it go away; it felt too awful.

I went through all kinds of fear wondering what it was, exactly how they must have felt. They had good reason to be frightened.

I was curious, and yet afraid, just like they must have been.

So I cut it off.

I have to learn to hang onto those things.

* * *

**All photographs by Norbert Ruebsaat**



GREG YOUNG-ING

# AN OVERVIEW OF ABORIGINAL LITERATURE AND PUBLISHING IN CANADA*

> Five hundred years have almost passed since Columbus came and discovered people who live here. Now everything is gone. Our land is gone, our water is polluted, all of those kinds of things, and the only thing that we have left that is still pretty intact is our voice. And we can't afford to let that go because if we let that go, we don't have anything left. As long as our voice is there, then we will survive.
>
> (Maria Campbell, June 1990, Vancouver)

> The challenge of Aboriginal publishers is slightly different than that of other new publishers. Indeed, it mirrors the challenge of Canadian publishers two decades ago: with limited financial assistance, Aboriginal publishers must establish their distinct voice within a greater community.
>
> (Karl Siegler, presentation before the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples in June of 1993)

## TRADITIONAL ABORIGINAL VOICE

Aboriginal cultural knowledge has traditionally been transmitted and documented primarily through the Oral Tradition which has often worked in conjunction with some physical methods of documentation such as dramatic productions, dance performances, petroglyphs and artefacts such as birch bark scrolls, totem poles, wampum belts and masks. This is the traditional Aboriginal way of transmitting knowledge and recording information and history. If publishing, then, is understood to be the documentation and dissemination of information on a wide scale, this was the method of "publishing" employed in North