

Foreword

This journal has given attention to the First Nations of British Columbia virtually since its founding in 1969. Special issues focusing on First Nations affairs have twice been published (“Indians in British Columbia,” No. 19, Autumn 1973; “British Columbia: A Place for Aboriginal Peoples?” No. 57, Spring 1983) and individual articles concerned with native Indian culture, history, and experience have appeared regularly in its pages.

Consistently informative, carefully researched, and widely read, this material shared one other obvious characteristic: it was in its entirety produced by non-aboriginal scholars, investigators, and commentators. By early 1990 this seemed a situation palpably in need of change. First Nations people in British Columbia and around the globe were increasingly asserting their right to speak for themselves. In many cases they had been telling their stories for years. The community at large was displaying an unprecedented willingness to listen to what they had to say. That they should have space to speak for themselves in this publication — especially given the fact that its contributors had for so long been writing about and even for them — seemed an altogether timely and reasonable proposition.

Adoption of this view, it must immediately be added, in no sense meant capitulation to the idea that only members of a group, society, or culture have authority to comment on the affairs of that group, society, or culture. *BC Studies* remains convinced that investigators of competence and sensitivity can contribute constructively to discussion of a society or culture whether they are affiliated with it or not. But the journal also thinks that even observers of that exemplary sort are not automatically entitled to monopolize what gets said. Societies and cultures should, where possible, be able to speak for themselves. Only then can their vision of their experience be presented in the (relatively) unmediated way justice and accuracy demand. Only then can those “outside” these societies get the sort of direct testimony concerning that vision which is essential to the building of a well-rounded and comprehensive understanding of it and of the social whole to which it is linked. And — perhaps most important of all — only then can

the world beyond those societies see something of the toughness and cohesion which has undergirded and made possible their survival. Shot through with commitment and authenticity, the writing, poetry, and art brought together here do not, then, merely inform: they offer extraordinarily eloquent testimony to the dignity, sense of self, and simple strength which has allowed the culture of their creators to persist and endure under circumstances which it would be a gratuitously offensive understatement to describe as difficult. It is an honour to be able to present them to our readers.

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Anxious to ensure that the form and content of this issue would be reflective of First Nations sensibilities in as many respects as possible, *BC Studies* invited the distinguished Gitksan artist, historian, author, and activist Doreen Jensen to act as its guest editor. Mrs. Jensen in turn arranged to collaborate with Sto:lo organizer and writer Cheryl Brooks. Experienced, articulate, and strongly committed to the culture and traditions of their people, they have brought together precisely the sort of balanced, coherent, stimulating, and varied set of papers, artwork, and poetry necessary to fulfillment of the volume's purpose.

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Born and raised in the Cariboo by her mother Agnes, who came from the Lorenzetto family of the Sto:lo Nation, and by her stepfather Arthur, who was of Lillooet ancestry, Cheryl Brooks attended high school and then worked her way up to the position of executive director of the Quesnel Tillicum Society's Native Friendship Centre, where she oversaw the development and delivery of a number of social and economic programs for aboriginal people and communities. During her time there she served on the Board of Directors of the provincial and national associations and was elected as the first woman president of the National Association of Friendship Centres. Mrs. Brooks has also been a member of a number of other social justice organizations including Human Rights and Civil Liberties and Native Women's groups and was the first Canadian native woman to be selected as a member of the Duke of Edinburgh's study conference which studied government, business, and labour relations in Australia.

She then relocated to the Lower Mainland and worked for the federal Department of the Secretary of State where she was responsible for policy development and the delivery of programs to support native political organizations, social and cultural development projects, and native com-

munications activities. She is now working in the federal Department of Western Economic Diversification, where she assists companies with their business development.

When Mrs. Brooks was given her Sto:lo name, Patholwet, the elders who served as witnesses at the ceremony instructed her to use her gifts of communication to weave bonds between people, just as the ancestor whose name she was receiving had been a weaver of blankets and baskets.

In 1981 Mrs. Brooks met Doreen Jensen. Since then they have collaborated on a number of projects related to native art and culture and have co-authored several articles and proposals.

In addition to her full-time job and family responsibilities, Mrs. Brooks volunteers with community organizations and works as a freelance writer and consultant. Mrs. Brooks and her husband Conan live in Coquitlam with their four children.

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Hahl Yee is the name that was given to Doreen Jensen by her family. The name belongs to the Killer Whale family crest from the House of Geel, of the Fireweed Clan, her mother's lineage.

Mrs. Jensen's early training began in the oral history tradition, learning the language (Gitksan), songs, legends, and customs from her parents and grandparents. Her formal schooling began in a two-room day school in Kispiox. At the age of ten she left her family to attend Alberni Residential School for two years, returning to a newly integrated public high school in Prince Rupert. After leaving high school she returned to her home territory to work.

Mrs. Jensen realized early in life that native people were not being heard; that their voice was silenced when discussing their destiny. In 1963, she began what would become a personal and professional journey to help change that. Conversant in her culture, and drawn to artistic expression, she chose to use the creative arts as a vehicle for conveying traditional cultural messages. In her view, it is through art that culture is made tangible, and it is through art that native people can communicate across cultures.

Mrs. Jensen is an artist, teacher, historian, community organizer and political activist. She is a founding member of many organizations, including 'Ksan Association and the Society of Canadian Artists of Native Ancestry, and she was instrumental in organizing the Third National Native Indian Artists Symposium in Hazelton in 1983. Her work concentrates on bringing native voices to the forefront and finding ways to

facilitate individual and cultural expression. She conceived of the Robes of Power exhibit, book, and video, wherein many artists and elders were able to share their cultural experience as expressed through the creation and use of the ceremonial robes. As a book-builder, she researched materials for publication of books for the Kitanmax School of Northwest Coast Indian Art, which again gave expression to native voices.

Because of her community involvement, her time to create her own art is limited, but still her work has been exhibited and collected by public institutions. Her work is appreciated for its beauty and strength, and for its ability to combine individual expression with cultural meaning and purpose. She continues to be involved in community service as chairperson with the Gitksan and Wet'suwet'en Vancouver Support Group, as a member of the Vancouver Sub-Committee on Cultural Diversity, and as a member of the Board of Trustees of the National Museum of Nature in Ottawa.

Her work has won her the Professional Native Women's Association's highest award, that of the Golden Eagle Feather, in recognition of her outstanding contribution to her community.

In 1987, she was given a special honour. At his last potlatch in Campbell River, B.C., the late Chief James Auld Sewid and his family bestowed upon her a name which had belonged to an aunt of Chief Sewid. The name given was Eik'awiga, which means Precious Jewel.

Mrs. Jensen and her husband Vergil make their home in South Surrey. They have four children and four grandchildren.

Allan Smith

Our Voice — Our Struggle

We are struggling to find our voice,
The right tone, the right pitch,
The right speed, the right code
The right thoughts, the right words

We are struggling to find the voice,
To say how long we've waited to speak,
To say we're tired of waiting so long,
To say we're tired — and frustrated

Struggling, we wax nostalgic,
Struggling for a new reading of history,
Struggling for human status,
Struggling just to be heard.

We are struggling against false accusations