

A tale of two nations

One of the most impressive legacies of the Vancouver 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games has to be the Squamish Lil'wat Cultural Centre in Whistler. The three-level structure, which opened in 2008, combines

architectural elements from a traditional Squamish longhouse and an earthen Lil'wat pit-house or *istken*. The films and exhibits in the spacious galleries reveal the peaceable co-existence and diverse cultures of these two First Nations, whose traditional territories overlap in the Whistler Valley. According to oral tradition, they also shared an

ancient village near The Black Tusk before the site was destroyed by a volcanic eruption.

The cultural centre includes a contemporary gallery with revolving displays; cedar canoes that can be raised to the ceiling for ceremonies in the Great Hall; an outdoor forest walk past medicinal plants and other natural

resources; a craft area where clumsy fingers can attempt bracelet making, weaving, or rock painting; and a café with a menu full of First Nations fusion food, such as venison chili and salmon chowder.

● **Info:** (www.slcc.ca; 866-441-7522)



“It was pretty emotional for me when I first came back,” he says. “I won’t lie. It was hard growing up here.”

Nathan, now 37, admits that his mother Lois’s embrace of tradition once tested his own teenaged impatience, his longing to be free of the past. Now he understands why she holds so strongly to ceremonies that might seem out of step with our digital age.

“We get wrapped up in the Internet and making money and following the Bill Gates dream,” he says. “Family doesn’t matter anymore, which is sad. That’s why my mom does it. That’s why her name is Mamáya7—“Mother of All.”

Nathan joins relatives who stand as witnesses with Bryn Lee. They have accepted gifts as a reminder to invoke her new name and its connection to this community. At first, Lois Joseph wanted to call her playful granddaughter The Faun,

but Nathan’s own Lil’wat name means “The Day of the Deerhunter”—not an ideal combination. Instead, Bryn Lee will share the pet name of Georgina Nelson, her great-grandmother.

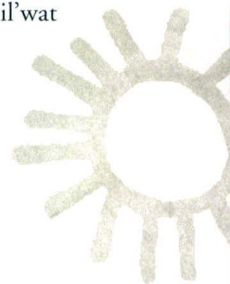
As I watch the dancing and singing that round out the ceremony, I am reminded of the instructions that guests received earlier. We were told that we must return home and share all that we learn at this gathering. We were reminded to address this young girl—the one with the orange-juice rimmed smile as bold as the sun that sneaks through the clouds—not simply as Bryn Lee but also as Tsinay’a7, a translation of Georgina.

Chee. Nee. Ya. I let the syllables echo in my mind before they slip away. Can I remember her name? I have to. I’ve made a promise. We all have.

Several people in Mount Currie confessed to me that they sometimes forget

how to pronounce the ancestral names of friends and family. They still struggle to teach their own tongues the intricacies of the unfamiliar sounds. But every name revived and shared in ceremonies like this one helps to bridge their rich past with the promise of the future—and to keep their living language on the lips of Lil’wat young and old. ☺

● **above: Staff at the Squamish Lil’wat Cultural Centre in Whistler, which opened in 2008, start their day with drumming and singing.**



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