



Totem Honor of Josephine Skamink Wells, Our Grandmother

The Totem pole behind the reception desk is a pole carved by Tommy Dunstan from the Thompson Salish People, Father to Shane Sanders, Jimsan, Shingee, Tom Bear and Leon Dunstan who are Nisqually/ Thompson Salish. Tommy had help carving and painting from Nisqually Community people: Shane Sanders, Brandon Franklin, Rene'(Ray) Celix, Chris Wells, Grace Ann Wells, Gabe Wells, Jason Kalama (now deceased), Tony James, Anita Paz, John Scott (Stephanie Scott's Husband also deceased), Roy Bobo Mann (deceased) and Lisa Wells who help me cook, make lot of Coffee and Always ... Good company. It took them about 3 years to complete. The wood was given by Joe Cushman who pulled it from the Bay and brought to the Rez to Tommy. He said maybe they can carve something with it.

When the pole was finished, Tommy decided to give it to the Wells Family in Honor of Josephine Skamink Wells, our Grandmother. When Tommy first met Josephine he told her that he was relatives of the Haida people. In doing this, He saw the hurt in her eyes of the wrong doings the Haida People had given to the Nisqually People. In his way, by honoring of the pole gift was his way of giving an apology between our grandmothers. The Pole has "Josephine" written on it. The Pole was then carried into the tribal Center by Tommy D, Jason K, Chris W, Tony J, Gabe W. and Ray C. It was placed there because Traditional ways demanded that it be place in a public place where it can be viewed by all. After many months, there was a Family gathering in which the Pole was brought out. It was presented to the descendants of Josephine Wells. At that time, Tommy openly acknowledged the carvers and they presented the Pole to all Josephine's Children, and also asked our Uncle Reggie Wells to be the Care Taker of this pole. Uncle Reggie accepted that responsibility. Tommy told Reggie that he can move it anywhere he wanted. He chose to leave it where it was behind the reception desk. It was left there.

When Our Uncle Reggie passed, by tradition, the responsibility of Care Taker went to his Son, Clifford and Daughter, Lorena Guidry. Again, their wishes were to leave the pole by the reception desk. But, they also have the option to move it.

In the completion of our new Tribal Center, I had notified our Tribal Council that if the pole was to be moved, and where it is to be moved is traditionally up to Clifford and Lorena.

With all respect to Native Tradition, the location of the pole will be decided by these two. They will get the location approved with Larry Sanchez, Operations Director for appropriate safe keeping and security. When this pole was originally moved to the Tribal Center, I explained this memorial Pole tradition to Larry, and Larry with all respect, knew this and assured the pole's security for many years along with Reggie, Clifford and Lorena. For this, we will always be grateful for Larry's interest and involvement.

This is the Totem Pole's story, and traditional care of a memorial pole. Many hours, days, weeks and months of hard work and sincere love went into making the Totem Pole of what it is now. I hope we all can keep this tradition going. We will certainly enjoy this pole for years to come.

Jean Sanders