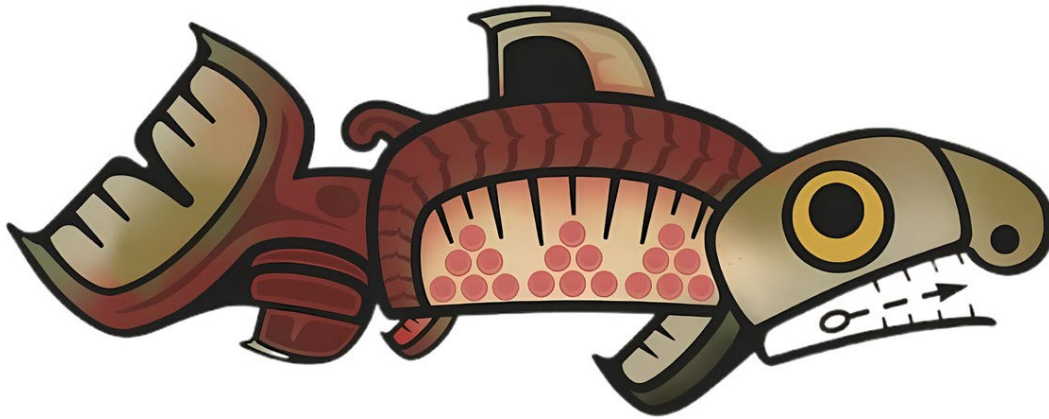




We are continuing regular newsletter updates to share exciting history from our Nations with the communities. Some of you know all about these teachings, but others do not, so it is our pleasure to introduce V.2, Edition seven of; **Tales from the Vault.**



Slam'n Salmon, by Sonny Assu. 2024

The Gift of Salmon

At 6:00 a.m. Wednesday August 6th, the first Tyee of the season - a powerful Chinook weighing 32 lbs - was brought in from the waters at the mouth of the Campbell River. The catch drew the same kind of early-morning excitement that has filled the banks for generations. While visitors have celebrated these big fish for nearly a century through groups like the Tyee Club, the Liḡwɪłdaḡw people have welcomed the salmon since time beyond memory. Long before photographs or newspapers, the people at ʔuxʷstilis (Tyee Spit) marked this moment each year, honouring the first salmon as the return of an important relative.

In Liḡwɪłdaḡw beliefs, **Kutəla** (salmon) are not viewed as “resources” but as supernatural beings, who live in their own villages beneath the water, powerful warriors who put on their kutəla masks each year to travel back up the rivers. They come willingly, and offer themselves so that humans can live well, and they expect care, respect, and gratitude in return.

This is because a long time ago, there was a period of time when the people had no kutəla. The villages along the rivers and sea survived on other foods, but they could feel that something was missing.



Then one day, a great being - some say it was **Kumugwe**, Chief of the Undersea – came and spoke to our ancestors. He told the people there was a gift waiting for them far upriver, if they were ready to receive it.

The being led the people to the headwaters, where they saw **kutəla** for the first time. Their silver backs flashed in the water as they swam. The people were shown how to catch them with nets and weirs, how to cook them over open fire, and how to dry them for winter. They were also taught the most important lesson, that the **kutəla** are our kin. They must be welcomed with ceremony and treated in a way that honours their sacrifice, so they will return year after year.

The teachings were clear: the first **kutəla** of the season should be carried with care, never dragged; cooked and shared so that all may taste; and the bones carefully returned to the water so the **kutəla** can go back to tell their relatives they were treated well. To harm the **kutəla** - by waste, rough handling, or greed - would risk the runs not returning.

For the people at **ḡuxwstilis**, this first **kutəla** often came in **ḡəmsḡəmsdi** (August), also known as the “time of empty fish storage boxes.” By August, the dried winter stores were nearly gone, and the return of **kutəla** brought not only spiritual renewal, but relief from hunger. It was a season of gratitude, when careful fishing, sharing, and ceremony helped ensure the **kutəla** would keep their promise to return.

That promise carried responsibilities. In the past, **kutəla** were greeted not as quarry, but as honoured guests. This relationship was part of a broader law: be mindful, take only what you need, and care for those who care for you.

Today, even without the formal ceremony, many **Liḡwíłdaḡw** still feel the meaning of that first catch. Standing on the riverbank or the deck of a fishing boat, there’s a quiet moment of thanks, to the **kutəla** for finding their way home, and to the waters that have carried them since time beyond memory.

As the season unfolds, may we remember the teachings from the salmon ceremony; treat the **kutəla** with respect, share what we have, and care for the intricate networks that bring them back to us.