

## Into the Continuum: Squamish Nation Powwow, North Vancouver, July 2008

*We dance at the powwow because it is enjoyable to do so, but more importantly because to dance makes the earth go around. We follow the earth's path, imitating her orbit and thus we are part of that movement. Because we are part of the movement of the earth our stopping would have the effect of ending the earth's path also. We are all connected after all.*

Steven and Gwen Point, Sto:Lo Nation

Powwows were held by the Squamish Nation in North Vancouver during the 1940s and 1950s. Organized with flair (and an abiding sense of cultural purpose) by the late Chief Simon Baker (*Khot La Cha*), these celebrations of dancing, drumming, and singing lasted for ten days; they were occasions for gathering First Nations participants and visitors from across British Columbia (as well as people from Saskatchewan, Alberta, and Montana. Commenting on this period of optimism and vitality, Squamish National educator Gloria Nahanee (*Tenálh*) observes: "The elders passed on and everything stopped; after 1958 the powwows disappeared for thirty years. The culture died down for a while."<sup>1</sup>

In 1988, the Squamish Nation Powwow was reinstated, under Gloria Nahanee's leadership (and with the loyal support of her husband, Keith Nahanee, and her two daughters, Kanoni and Riannon). From her life-long perspective: "Dance has led the way to our culture being revived." For as she recalls, "The old spirits told me they wanted the powwow revived and that our young children would carry this on." Her husband, speaking as a longstanding cultural worker and powwow advocate for youth, comments, accordingly: "I think of the eagles and the hawks, the swans. The spirits of those birds live on in the feathers that we wear. They carry us and help us to be light and our spirits to be light. They say that because the eagle flies the highest, it carries our thoughts and our prayers to the Creator. They say that the Creator would send back his visions for us of the things that we need to carry us in life. He would send the dreams, the visions that give us our beadwork and show us how to make our regalia, show us what we should wear, the colours and designs that are all a part of us."

<sup>1</sup> All quotations drawn from Kay Johnston and Gloria Nahanee, *Spirit of Powwow* (Vancouver: Hancock House, 2003).



