

When teaching students how to sing Tsu Heidi use this lesson to teach the students the history behind the song and firstly, who George Davis was, what his important contribution to the Lingít culture he offered and why his words are so important. This is also used to teach Lingít protocol in giving proper recognition to the individual. Recognizing the person's name, the clan he belonged to, the clan house and village he is from. Also emphasizing that it is important to know what you are saying, knowing the meaning of the words is very important too. Repeat the clan song introduction and the meaning of the words every time before singing the song.

Who is George Davis?

George Davis was born May 7th 1899 in Angoon. He was Raven Deisheetaan from the Steel House in Angoon, where he lived most of his life. He received his Lingít name, Kichnaalx, from his paternal uncle. He received 2 years of education from Sheldon Jackson. He was an active member of the Alaska Native Brotherhood in Angoon and Hoonah. He also lived in Washington DC for 10 years advocating for Alaska Native causes.

He was a commercial fisherman who hand trolled and seined for a living. He owned two boats of his own, which he used to fish commercially and to provide for his family.

George Davis received extensive training in the Lingít culture from his elders. He was a trained historian, a true, trained storyteller. Why is it so important to be a trained storyteller in his time?

Our histories, traditions, songs and practices were never written down or documented. They had to be taught through speeches, stories and oral instruction. He had a very dramatic style of speech. His words and stories were documented in a Lingít video documentary Haa Shagoon, Haa tuwunaagu yis, lingit oratory/famous speeches of the Lingít elders and Haa Shuka, which are Lingít oral narratives, our treasured stories from our

culture. He was so knowledgeable, he was documented in all of these books. (hold up each book to show)

He was very active in ceremonial life. He was known as a “Big Man” down south they call the leaders Chiefs, here in southeast we call them a Big Man. He served many times as a Naa Kaani. This person is known as the MC for Lingít ceremonies and potlatches. That means they give many speeches. These speeches address the people in the audience. A Naa Kaani knows who is in the audience, what clan they belong to, how they are related. He introduces each speaker, and acknowledges what clan they are and who they are related to in the audience. It is So important to know who you are related to in the Lingít culture.

He worried so much that the culture would not thrive. The very first time he was interviewed by Nora Dauenhauer, they did not know each other, but he was married to her paternal aunt. She was nervous to interview him, and maybe he knew that. He knew they were related, so he welcomed her into his home, made her feel comfortable as she is his relative. When he sat down at his table, he talked to her for Nine and a Half Hours, straight. At the end of that interview, he told Nora, “Don’t let our Lingít culture die.” That’s how important he felt about his culture. He was so committed to seeing it live, he wanted to give everything he had.

That’s WHO George Davis was.

Now let’s talk about his speech. Where did this song come from.

On May 29th, 1980 Sealaska sponsored it’s first elders conference. The theme was “Elders Speak to the future.” At this conference, the Gajaa Heen Dancers performed Lingít songs, both happy songs and Yeik’, spirit songs. Charlie Joseph, the elder leading the dance group elaborated clan ownership of the songs, the villages where they were composed, and the composers relationship to the students. This explained the grandchildren's right to use a grandparents song or “Things they used to say.”

Because the students were singing Yeik' spirit songs. The elders were so concerned. Yeik' songs are the most delicate. They call forth spirits of elders who have passed. So in order for the elders to ensure the safety of the dancers, they began to give speeches and sing songs. They were cleansing the event by way of oratory. This is the Lingít tradition.

In one of George Davis speeches he said (in summary)

“...We have only uncovered a tiny portion of the way our ancient people used to do things. Now it is only to soothe your pain of what befell you. Now we are just trying to calm it inside you, how it turned in our minds. We don't want it to only echo in the air. We had given up what you told us to look at. We had given up our mother's grandfathers, our maternal uncles culture, their language. We had given them up for ourselves. You have untied it for us. That is why *we will open it again this container of wisdom left in our hands* Our maternal uncles and our grandfathers, now, they are here. Yes...”

The song we are about to sing.

Tsu heidi shugaxtootaan. - We will open it again. (open the box)

Ya yaakoosge daakeit - this container of wisdom. (pull out the books)

Haa jeex' a nax has kawdik'eet' - left in our hands. (palms to audience)

What does it mean? What do you think is in the container of wisdom?

Traditions, culture, language, oratory, it is Haa Kusteeyi, our way of life. He is saying, we will open this box, we will Learn our traditions, we will value our culture, we will continue our way of life. We will not let it die.

Those are powerful words. What you are singing, is not just a fun energetic song. You are saying, “I will not let it die, my culture, my ancestors

traditions and way of life. We will open this container of wisdom left in our hands. Yes. We will not let it die”