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IN MEMORIAM

Chief Joseph (Joe) William Mathias
November 12, 1943 — March 10, 2000

THE VANCOUVER SUN | March 11, 2000

Squamish Nation loses its 'greatest warrior'
Glenn Bohn |

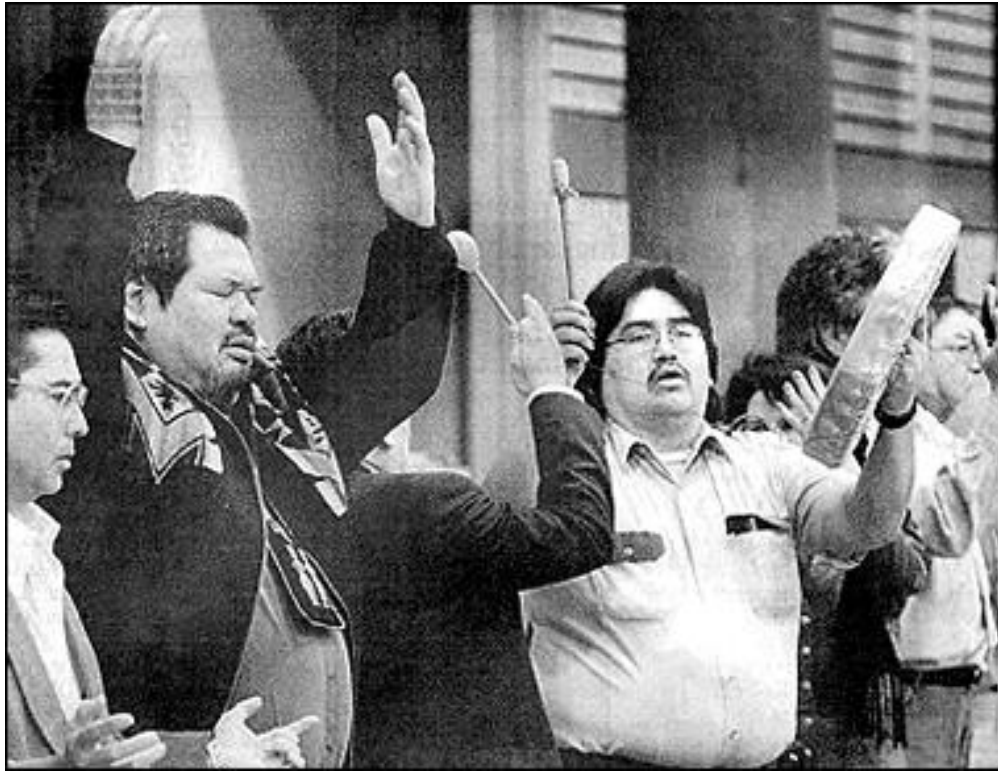
The sudden death Friday of Chief Joe Mathias, one of Canada's top advocates for aboriginal land claims, brought an immediate outpouring of tributes from government and aboriginal leaders and a call for greater unity among native groups.

Premier Ujjal Dosanjh, federal Indian Affairs Minister Robert Nault and federal Environment Minister David Anderson, the Liberals' senior minister from B.C., were among those lauding Chief Mathias' achievements, both on behalf of the Squamish Nation and all Canadian aboriginals.

Squamish hereditary Chief Gibby Jacob said Chief Mathias died at 5:20 a. m. Friday. The 56-year-old had been in hospital for several days. He died with his wife Lisa at his side, Jacob said.

"We, as the Squamish people, lost our greatest warrior," Jacob said.

Dosanjh sent a message of condolence that was read out to mourners at the First Nations Summit conference that was under way at the time of Chief Mathias' death.



Members of the Squamish Nation sing prayers for Chief Mathias at the First Nations Summit
GLEN BAGLO, photo

"Chief Mathias will be remembered for his great accomplishments, including his work in the establishment of the B.C. Treaty Commission," Dosanjh said.

"He will be greatly missed by all those lives he has touched over the years."

First Nations Summit task group member Chief Robert Louie and others called for unity among native Indian groups in the wake of Chief Mathias' departure.

"We must put aside any differences that are there and unite in the strength that we must garner," he said.

Willie Seymour of the Coast Salish people called his death a sign. "The traditional warnings were there for our people," he said.

"Just a few nights ago, one of our elders got up to speak to say that in the next three or four days, we were going to receive a message that will bring us to reality. The message was what was delivered today."

First Nations Summit Grand Chief Edward Johns said Friday: "There are no answers today, but we do know that a human being -- Great Chief Mathias -- is a historic figure amongst our peoples and all peoples in this country.

"He's had profound impacts on all of us, and the highest people in this land. But one thing I know about him is his humble heart, his strong heart, and his profound respect for all us."

B.C. Lieutenant-Governor Garde Gardom, whom Chief Mathias had criticized just last week, also expressed his sadness at the chief's death.

Gardom had, during swearing-in ceremonies for Dosanjh quoted explorer Captain George Vancouver in a manner some native leaders construed as suggesting aboriginal people were not the first B.C.'s first occupants. Chief Mathias had been among those demanding an apology.

Chief Mathias' death turned the First Nations Summit conference into a sombre memorial to a man who dedicated his adult life to aboriginal land claims.

Hundreds of delegates in the Squamish Nation Recreation Centre in North Vancouver stood and held out their hands as prayer songs and the beat of tom-tom drums heralded the beginning of a mourning period.

Nault called Chief Mathias, a hereditary chief of the Squamish Indians and an elected representative of the provincial First Nations Summit since 1991, "one of our great leaders."

He said Chief Mathias had "one of the sharpest minds I've ever met" and lauded his sense of humor.

"He always had that little smile on his face, telling you sometimes where to go, and sometimes where to get off, but always with a little smile, and a way of making our negotiations and work very enjoyable," Nault said.

Environment Minister David Anderson, the Liberals' senior B.C. minister, called Chief Mathias an "outstanding individual, a fine human being" who was forceful in his beliefs but who understood the need for co-operation.

"He did a tremendous amount to bridge the gaps that there are in our society. It really is a great loss to British Columbia, a great loss to Canada," said Anderson.

Chief Mathias was an executive and founding member of the First

Nations Summit, established to negotiate talks aimed at resolving land claims in British Columbia.



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