

IN HONOUR of CHIEF JOE MATHIAS
Eulogy by Wendy John

My Friends and Relatives,
A brilliant light has passed.

t'echux ánm siyám

Chief Joe Mathias, a great Leader for the Squamish Nation, for all our Nations, for British Columbia and indeed, for Canada.
We say his name today with reverence and with strong voices; our voices made stronger because we knew and heard the voice and heart of Joe Mathias.

We come together today with heavy but strong hearts; our hearts made stronger because we knew and were touched by Joe Mathias.
We gather today, family, friends and loved ones, here in "Joe's House", to honour this greatest of Leaders, to celebrate his life and pay tribute to the immeasurable contribution he made during his all too brief time with us. And we gather with great love and respect to sing our prayers and help to send t'echux ánm on his final journey.

As we think of Joe and remember him there are so many words and thoughts that come to mind to describe this wonderful man, who and what he was. First and most important he was a loving husband to Lisa, to his daughter Stefany totally devoted.

To his extended family he was an anchor and an inspiration, a respectful and generous son, brother and uncle. To his friends Joe was warm, caring and compassionate, fiercely protective and loyal to a fault. And for so, so many of us he was a great teacher and mentor.

As a hereditary chief and elected leader of the Squamish Nation, he dedicated his entire life to the fight for a just, secure and prosperous future for his people.

For all these strengths however, it was Joe who would continually describe himself simply as "that bow legged Indian from the other side of the tracks."

I believe with all my heart that being 'a Squamish man' was the very essence of Joe. His humility, humour, love for family and friends, sense of responsibility, enormous courage and integrity came from the traditions of his people and his Nation.

Those traditions and the deep spirituality that are so much a part of the history and culture of the Squamish people defined Joe Mathias and guided his destiny. Of that there can be no doubt.

Not poverty, not hard times, not adversity, pain, nor isolation lessened Joe's pride in his roots. Indeed, it was his profound belief in the traditions of his people, his humble beginnings and the sum of his life experiences, both good and bad, happy and painful that moulded Joe's character. It was these things that honed his skills and enabled him to carry our struggle forward with such conviction, strength, honour and dignity. He truly fulfilled his potential as a human being.

I know in our hearts we feel the terrible pain of his loss. We ache with grief, we feel anger, shock and confusion that he was taken from us so early, so soon. There will never be another Joe Mathias. His shoes cannot be filled. We try to imagine life without him and cannot. And we ask why? Why did he leave us now?

I believe the answer to that question and to the easing of our sorrow is found in remembering all the facets of Joe's life with us, the truths he shared and the messages he brought to us.

There were many sides to this man. There was the intensely private Joe with his family and friends; the one who loved nothing better than to have dinner with close friends, to laugh, to debate and share stories. There was the hereditary Chief and supporter of the Longhouse; the Joe steeped in the traditions and culture of the Squamish people. There was the public Joe, the skilled politician, tough negotiator, great orator and champion of our rights.

His qualities and strengths were recognized almost from the moment of his birth. Joe grew up very close to this House, right at the mouth of the Capilano River, under the Lion's Gate Bridge and literally on the other side of the tracks. But it was from this point of land that his family, through the generations exercised their responsibilities as the protectors of the rich and beautiful lands.

Those were hard times and living where he did Joe was also keenly aware of the great divide between his people and the lifestyle of the non native people of West Vancouver. In fact, he protested when his Grandmother insisted that he attend public school rather than go away to residential school. Joe wanted to be with his friends, the other children from the 'rez'. His childhood, while poor in economic terms was full of the happiest memories and rich in every other way.

But his grandparents remained determined and Joe and his sister Judy became the first native children to attend public school in West Van. It was an experience that would

deeply influence Joe's path. The loneliness he felt, the isolation, the inequalities between the two communities, were all too real. And although in High School he took immense strength from the companionship of the boys he had grown up with, Joe's anger and frustration grew at a system which treated him and our people different because of skin colour and culture.

Joe was blessed with a keen intellect and that enormous potential could never be fulfilled through attending school. So Joe embarked on that journey himself in a single minded pursuit of knowledge and ideas. He read the classics, he tackled Russian writers, he read the French and German philosophers and the English and Spanish writers. He read Hemingway and Faulkner and educated himself about the spiritual traditions and thoughts of the great leaders of history like Gandhi.

For Joe this thirst for knowledge would last throughout his life. In recent times, friends encouraged him to write pressing him to share his own profound ideas and insights, those thoughts Joe was forever committing to the pages of the tiny notebook he always carried.

But it was the way in which Joe melded his learning from other cultures with the strong values of his own that will be his legacy. As one of Joe's friends said, "he was a soaring orator". He could make words dance and echo through the halls. And he taught us that a life worth living, a goal worth pursuing is based on respecting the humanity in all people.

Joe never did things by half. When he discovered a new interest he then set out to become an expert. He had a passion for thoroughbred horses and he was pretty good at picking the winners. No matter what it was, he would approach each new experience with enormous zeal. Horses, golf, even the Sun Run. This would have been Joe's third year to enter the ten kilometre run, a newly discovered adventure inspired by and shared with Lisa.

Joe's life with Lisa during the last five years is something for which we are all grateful. His love for her was so deep and all consuming. With Lisa, Joe found a profound happiness, a partner who truly loved him for himself a confidante whom he trusted to share every part of his life.

I remember at the very beginning of their relationship Ed and I having dinner with Joe. Normally it was Joe who liked to linger and talk but at this dinner he spent most of it looking at his watch. We were surprised when it was he who wanted to leave early and curious because of a certain glow about him, a noticeable change in our Joe. I am going to confess that Ed and I actually considered following Joe we knew something was going on.

But it wasn't long before we all knew and with Joe, took Lisa into our hearts. Because of their love our lives have been enriched. Joe said Lisa was his soul mate. He would smile and say, "as Jack Nicholson would say, she makes me want to be a better man." Lisa, your memories will be your strength; your shared dreams will be your courage as you face the days ahead. He loved you so very much.

Joe had one daughter who was the very light in his eyes, his touchstone and the source of his energy. Janice her mother has said that for Stefany, Joe claimed for himself a total and unconditional love; a love that for a mother could, on occasion, present challenges but for which he would never apologize.

Stefany allowed Joe to show his gentleness and discover, as we all do with our children, his sense of fun and playfulness.

Stefany Mathias was schooled by her father in the traditions of her people. He was stern and unrelenting in teaching her the responsibilities she holds as a Squamish woman. Joe took Stefany to meetings at an early age and to the Longhouse so she would know her history, feel, understand and be her culture. Stefany, the lessons you have learned and absorbed from your father are what will guide you in the future. His greatest joy was to be introduced as Stefany Mathias' father - he will forever be with you. We know the great commitment and respect that Joe had for his family: his mother, brothers and sisters and his many nieces and nephews. He was so happy to see his family returning to the Longhouse.

We shall also remember and are grateful for the public Joe Mathias, the great Squamish warrior who fought unrelentingly for the rights of his own people and on behalf of Aboriginal people across the country. It was a public life that brought pain and frustration. It was a public life that demanded too much of Joe at times and required sacrifice and even suffering.

It was decided by his elders while Joe was very young that he would be the Hereditary Chief. He was groomed to be a statesman. Councillors have told me that when Joe entered a Council meeting the mood would change. There was simply, an aura and he had a different way of talking.

When Joe was first elected, there were Councillors who had already served there for more than twenty years. But it wasn't long before even the most experienced were looking to Joe for his leadership, vision and understanding.

He brought to the council table and to all gatherings and meetings the ways of his ancestors. He would wait, patiently listen and listen some more until everyone had spoken and said their piece. And then, in that strong, steady voice of his that is so familiar he would bring the thoughts and the ideas of the people together and simply and directly set a course of action. The faith and trust of those who worked with him in his vision and leadership came from the fact that he had heard and understood them. But the Squamish Nation also had to share his great leadership as the battle for our lands, titles, rights and governments gained momentum on the national stage. From the tabling of the infamous White paper to the historic Aboriginal Constitutional Conferences to the creation of the First Nations' Summit and the BC Treaty Process Joe's leadership was pivotal.

Always, always Joe was there and his particular style dominated many of these historic times. Side by side with other strong Aboriginal leaders across the country, he argued, debated, cajoled and persuaded. To make things better for our people was never enough for Joe. He would settle for nothing less than a change in our relationship with non-Aboriginal Canadian. Recognition, respect and reconciliation through negotiation were the goals he pursued and the results he demanded.

At the table he was a fierce negotiator and he was always prepared. It was that insistence on preparedness and sound argument that more than anything gave credibility to our position, strength to our issues and enabled progress.

Over the years Joe met and worked across the table with Prime Ministers, Cabinet Ministers, international leaders, business leaders, academics, lawyers and individuals from all walks of life. So strong were his convictions and sense of self as a Squamish leader that he was never intimidated or threatened. His modesty, directness and enormous presence never failed to impress and his credibility was beyond question.

When times got very difficult, and they often did, Joe was always there to make us feel that another day was possible, that no matter how dark the day or the hour seemed we would win our struggle in the end.

Throughout these times Joe forged deep and enduring friendships with the men and women who were at his side and he always demonstrated a deep respect for all our Leaders across this province and throughout Canada.

But there was also something very special, which over the years has had a profound impact on my own life And that is Joe's infinite and abiding respect for women. It comes from deep within his traditions I know Joe's enormous regard for the contribution of

women to our struggle and his sustained encouragement of our leadership set an important example. For that I pay him special tribute.

For all of us, he was a beacon who never competed for the limelight with his colleagues but rather appreciated and admired their abilities. He felt a profound sense of disappointment whenever our Leaders were criticized and left unsupported. Joe believed with all his heart that our tradition of honouring and respecting our leaders is fundamental. And I know his message is strong that we must find our way again to those important teachings of our ancestors, to respect our leaders and lay aside those divisions that threaten the survival of our communities.

Chief Joe Mathias had so many gifts as a leader. But in a speech he made not long ago he talked of the many gifts of all of our people. He spoke particularly of the great gift of language and of the great words of our ancestors. He said of those words that "They can never be silenced but echo through the universe for all time".

In her pain and anguish on Friday, one of our elders said death is such a thief and she was so right. We all feel cheated out of the times we looked forward to sharing with Joe Mathias, our leader and our friend. But in my own struggle to find an answer to that question of why he was taken from us now, I find comfort in his message about the echo of our people's voices over time and through our history.

Joe's message came from his spiritual self because he was listening to those words and those voices. As hard as it is to say at this moment I think Joe was meant to be remembered as he was at this time in his life, at the pinnacle of his strength, with fire still in his belly happy in his life and with loving family and friends surrounding him. Surely Joe gave us enough. We have to let him go on now and listen for his voice as it joins with our ancestors in that great echo throughout the universe.

Chief Joe Mathias how we will miss you.

The proud, proud Squamish man.
The great leader of our people and our friend.
We thank the Creator for your presence among us.
We thank the Squamish Nation for sharing you with us.

We will always remember you have taught us well and we will listen.