

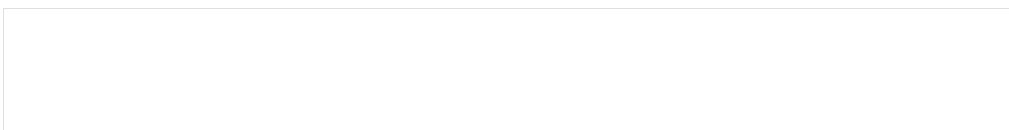
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## Splatsin First Nation plots dramatic return of traditional stories

By Charlotte Helston

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Actor Aaron Leon displays a mosquito mask made for the play. (CHARLOTTE HELSTON / InfoTel Multimedia)

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ENDERBY - After years of safekeeping in archives and in the minds of elders, stories of the Splatsin First Nation are being told the way they should be; with music, actors, costumes and an audience.

Tuwitames, [a community play presented by Runaway Moon Theatre and the Splatsin Language Program](#), runs August 6-10 at the Splatsin teaching centre behind the Super Save Gas Station in Enderby. The play, jointly written by Cathy Stubington of Runaway Moon,

Rosalind Williams, the coordinator of the language program, and James Fagan Tait, a playwright from Vancouver who's also directing the play, tells the stories, both traditional and contemporary of the Secwepemc people.

Seeing the stories come to life in Tuwitames — the Splatsin word for the act of growing up — has been an emotional experience for Williams. So many people are hearing them for the first time. She remembers when orators still traveled from town to town in her childhood, bringing the ancient creation stories to communities.

"With the coming of TV and the Internet there was a disruption to how all that information was being transferred from one generation to the next," Williams says.

The nightmare of the Sixties Scoop, when large numbers of First Nations youth were taken from their families and deposited in foster homes, robbing children of the opportunity to learn the old stories, Williams says.

"A lot of the stories have been documented but they're not active. They're sitting on a shelf as a recording or as notes," Williams says. "Some of the stories that flow from the Splatsin have been sitting dormant."

With Tuwitames, new life is being brought to the stories. Actors as young as four to as old as 83 are not only learning them, but becoming part of them. The play's music director Renae Morriseau describes it as the language of theatre opening a door to Splatsin history and culture.

"We don't see the audience as an audience, we see them as witnesses," Morriseau says. "We hope they go

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away and continue telling the stories, so the lived experience of the land can rest in the hearts and minds of those that come to see the play."

The stories in the play have already engaged local kids involved in the production, many of them asking to hear other tales or begging for more details.

The play's main character is a young man who grew up outside the community and is returning to his roots. Aaron Leon, a first time actor, is performing the role and says he can relate with the character.

"I've definitely felt some alienation from the community returning back," Leon says. "It's a role I think a lot of people feel about their communities just because there's that loss of cultural identity. People are almost relearning that identity with this play."

Along with the old legends, Tuwitames tells of eras like the Sixties Scoop.

"This is way to tell a story about times that were difficult in a non-threatening way that will help people understand what those times were like," Runaway Moon general manager Lark Lindholm says. "At times there's humour, at times you feel angry, at times you just really want to cry because it's that touching."

The play runs at 7:30 p.m. nightly from August 6-10. Tickets are \$20 for adults, \$10 for youth and seniors and \$5 for children under 12. For more information contact Runaway Moon at info@runawaymoon.org.

A limited number of silk screened Tuwitames prints will also be available.



Cathy Stubington, James Fagan Tait and Rosalind Williams step behind the scenes of Tuwitames where costumes and props are being built. (CHARLOTTE HELSTON /InfoTel Multimedia)

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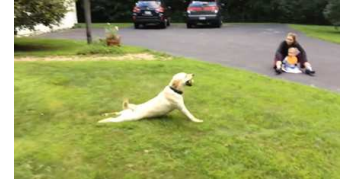
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