



Trey Rorick said making *Edge of the Knife* was among the greatest experiences of his life. (Andrew Hudson/Haida Gwaii Observer)

# Haida language stars in *Edge of the Knife*

ANDREW HUDSON / Sep. 4, 2018 12:00 p.m. / [LOCAL BUSINESS](#) / [NEWS](#)

A spine-tingling Gaagiixid appeared on Haida Gwaii this weekend and more than a thousand people saw it.

But what sticks in mind after watching *SGaawaay K'uuna / Edge of the Knife* is not only the urchin-pierced face of the wild man, or the scenes of his family fishing a summer at Yan.

What is also striking are all the jokes, greetings, worried talks, shouts and songs sounded in Haida language over the whole 90-minute film.

Haida elder Delores Churchill, who jokes with a circle of weavers in the film, had some serious words at the film debut in Old Massett on Sunday night.

“You know my dream, from seeing this movie, is that we don’t lose our Haida language,” she said to a cheering crowd of nearly 600 people in the Old Massett Village Hall.

“And I’m not just talking to the children, I’m talking to all of you,” she added.

“I’m asking all of you to save our language.”

Shortly before going to the Toronto International Film Festival, *Edge of the Knife* played here for what co-director Helen Haig-Brown said will be its best audience.

Set in 1800s Haida Gwaii, the film tells the story of the nobly born but careless Addiits’ii, who causes the tragic death of a young boy and is transformed over winter into a wild and tormented Gaagiixid.

William Russ plays Kwa, who was Addiits’ii’s closest friend.

Speaking about the weeks that the cast and crew were shooting at Yan last year, Russ said it felt like a real village.

Trey Rorick, who played Kwa’s son, echoed the feeling.

“It just felt like old times, and how we’re supposed to be — all the elders, all the children, all together,” he said.

“That’s how are people always used to be, all together.”

Fellow cast member Brandon Kallio spoke about how growing up, the only movie roles he ever saw for Indigenous people were the “Indians” in cowboy films.

“It’s pretty amazing how we’re no longer in the backdrop,” Kallio said.

“We’re here in the forefront. It’s all part of changing the view, not only for how the Haida but all the people are viewed in the world.”

Gwaai Edenshaw, who co-directed *Edge of the Knife*, said there will be a longer cut made, around three or four hours, that includes all the Haida dialogue not heard in the 90-minute version.

“It will include all the language we have so it will be a more useful tool for learning for everybody at home,” he said.

Among all the cheers for the cast and crew on Sunday, some of the loudest were for elder Harold Williams, who plays a shaman in the film.

Midway through shooting, Williams got sick and was flown to hospital in Vancouver. He didn’t stay long — doctors told him to hurry and get back on set.

“I feel so good,” Williams said, thanking everyone in the Skidegate Haida Immersion Program (S.H.I.P.) for teaching him the Haida language over the last seven years. “I actually feel like a movie star!”

It was to Harold Williams and others like him that fellow actor William Russ gave special thanks.

“Haawa to our elders,” Russ said. “You are the ones who preserved our language — you made this possible.”

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[andrew.hudson@haidagwaiiobserver.com](mailto:andrew.hudson@haidagwaiiobserver.com)

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Co-directors Helen Haig-Brown and Gwaii Edenshaw address the crowd.  
(Andrew Hudson/Haida Gwaii Observer)



Edge of the Knife actors Sphenia Jones and Harold Williams enter the hall  
through an arch of Devil's Club. (Archie Stocker Sr./Haida Gwaii Observer)





Edge of the Knife actors Sherri Dick and Leo Gagnon enter the hall. (Archie Stocker Sr./Haida Gwaii Observer)



Nearly 600 people turned out to the Sept. 2 debut of the Haida language film  
Edge of the Knife in Old Massett. (Andrew Hudson/Haida Gwaii Observer)