



---

## PEOPLE

---

# Lunch with Edge of the Knife co-director Gwaai Edenshaw

Lucy Hyslop May 28, 2018



Credit: Courtesy of Gwaai Edenshaw/[Gwaai.com](http://Gwaai.com)



# With his first feature, Haida artist Gwaai Edenshaw brings the film business to his ancestral home.



From carving and metalsmithing to helping identify the plants on the protection list used by loggers, Gwaai Edenshaw is something of a Renaissance man. Now, as a co-director and co-writer, he's leading the charge for a new film industry in his native Haida Gwaii—though it's not moviemaking as Hollywood would necessarily know it.

His \$1.8-million feature, *Edge of the Knife*, is in the Haida language with English subtitles. (Edenshaw is a founding member of the Haida storytelling group Q'altsi'da Kaa, which helps promote a tongue that has an estimated 20 speakers on the islands.) Backed by Kingulliit Productions Inc. among others, including the B.C. and federal tax credit programs as well as the Canada Media Fund, the film notably features producer Jonathan Frantz from the Nunavut-based company behind the 2001 classic *Atanarjuat: The Fast Runner*, and that film's Inuit director, Zacharias Kunuk, as executive producer.

---

During our butter chicken lunch at Burgoo Bistro in Vancouver's Point Grey, the 41-year-old explains how the First Nations tradition of trading was key to creating the movie, which wrapped in the spring and whose producers hope it will make the roll call of film festivals worldwide. For example, Edenshaw now owes the map-making department of another supporter, the Council of the Haida Nation, for printouts needed for the shoot. (He'll teach them classes on medicinal shrubs and monumental red cedar, which he has studied in the field for more than a decade.) "My dad also allowed us to use some of his sea otter furs in exchange that we would sew them together into a tunic for him," he says of Guujaaw, the council's well-known former president.

Edenshaw's transition into digital storytelling follows stints creating the edgy Internet animation series *Haidawood*, which started in 2007, and writing, with his brother Jaalen, *Sounding Gambling Sticks* in Haida for the stage the following year. Mentored by the late artist Bill Reid as a teenager, he has a jewelry art and design diploma from Vancouver Community College and exhibits in galleries nationwide and in Seattle and Santa Fe.

With cameras and other film equipment now installed on the islands, Edenshaw would like to echo the longstanding Kingulliit approach of exploring Indigenous culture through locally created movies. He's confident that his new film—riffing on a Haida saying that "the world is as sharp as the edge of a knife; as you go along you have to be careful or you will fall off one side or the other"—has given the Haida "proof of concept" of a sustainable business.



"Our actors look so good, the landscape is beautiful, and hopefully the story holds up to scrutiny; I feel really good about it," says

Edenshaw, whose musician partner, Kinnie Starr, contributed to the film score. Although, he notes, the hierarchy of telling Haida stories is clear—no matter who's the director: "I'm the boss on set until the elders tell me otherwise."

Of seeking alternatives to logging, he adds, "We also aspire to non-resource industries in our community." The Haida may control what is felled, but he still thinks "being in the business of logging introduces a crisis of personality because we've fought logging as long as I've been alive."

Edenshaw is quick to point out that the Haida Nation has a long history of "asserting Haida law on our land." Growing up in a strong political network and with the previous generations doing the heavy lifting to ensure that its art is recognized and valued, he's been able to explore different parts of his culture. "I definitely have a distinct privilege in terms of the time I was born into, and it allows me to stretch out into different spaces," Edenshaw says. "Although we still have responsibilities—just because we've made strides doesn't mean that we've achieved equilibrium or justice."

### THREE THINGS ABOUT... GWAAI EDENSHAW

1. After 15 years trying to track down the Styrofoam sets created by Haida artist Don Yeomans for *White Fang*, the 1990 movie, he found them in a Vancouver warehouse after a chance conversation with a film industry veteran. "It was always such a mystery where they went—I was so happy to find them," Edenshaw says.
2. When he was growing up in Masset, his first foray into art was carving avocado stones and toothpicks, until his father suggested that he work in gold or something else of value. In 2009, Edenshaw created the art piece *Putting Things Together in His Mind*, the "world's most expensive kaleidoscope, which was over a pound of gold."
3. Soon after he was born, the RCMP went looking for his parents, who were travelling in a skiff at the time, because they hadn't named him within the requisite six months. He was eventually named in Haida Gwaii's Windy Bay.



[Like](#)

[f Share](#)

[t Tweet](#)

[in Share](#)

[+ More](#)

### Stay informed with BCBusiness

Daily updates on what's happening in BC's business world.



Enter your email

Join Us

## Recommended for You

---



PEOPLE

**The Greening of Ian Gill**

He used to be a business-hating journalist. Today, he drives an SUV, owns a million-dollar home and draws a six-figure salary. He also runs one of the most successful environmental...



PEOPLE

**BC Economic Development Association Awards 2019**

The British Columbia Economic Development Association (BCEDA) and FortisBC announced the winners of the 2019 BC Economic Development Awards

PEOPLE

**Barack Obama sounds alarm on inequality and climate change**

In a recent Vancouver visit, former U.S. president Barack Obama talked about his time in office and the threats posed by climate change and inequality.



PEOPLE

**Vancouver International Wine Festival Bacchanalia Gala Dinner & Auction  
2019**

The Vancouver International Wine Festival Bacchanalia Gala Dinner & Auction 2019, attended by over 400 guests, raised over \$229,000 benefitting charitable partner Bard on the Beach Shakespeare Festival



FINANCE

## **Invested in Women**

BCBusiness + BMO Bank of Montreal Ongoing development, resources and recognition help champion advancement





PEOPLE

## Canada's Walk of Fame Celebration Vancouver

Canada's Walk of Fame Celebration Vancouver honours hometown inductees Jim Pattison, Seth Rogen and Evan Goldberg

---

### Comment on this Article

0 Comments

Add a comment...

---

Facebook Comments Plugin



## **BCBusiness**

[About Us](#)

[Contact Us](#)

[Advertise With Us](#)

[Online Submissions Policy](#)

## **The Magazine**

[Subscribe to the Magazine](#)

[The Current Issue](#)

[Past Issues](#)

## **Newsletter**

[Subscribe/Unsubscribe](#)

## **Our Other Sites**

[Canada Wide](#)

[BCLiving](#)

[Real Weddings](#)

Copyright © Canada Wide Media Limited. All Rights Reserved  
230, 4321 Still Creek Drive Burnaby, B.C. V5C 6S7, 604-299-7311  
Use of this site constitutes acceptance of our [Terms of Use](#) & [Privacy Policy](#).

