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I would like to dedicate this book to my late  
mother Martha Morgan and my mother-in-law  
Louise Watts who taught me a lot about cooking.

— Dolly Watts, Chief Lian

# Introduction

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Welcome to **WHERE PEOPLE FEAST**, a cookbook that sheds light on the unique culinary traditions and cooking techniques of Native American people who live along the Pacific Northwest Coast of British Columbia, Canada. This collection shows how to prepare and preserve wild game, seafood, vegetables, fruits, and unusual ingredients such as oolichan, herring roe, and sopalali berries, (all of which can be purchased online from distributors if not from your local specialty or gourmet markets). The foods and culinary traditions from two areas in particular are featured, which make up the main cultural heritage of the authors, Dolly and Annie Watts. The first is the Gitk'san Nation territory (approximately 27,000 acres/110 square kilometers) in central British Columbia, which has two great rivers, the Bulkley and the Skeena, that pass through it. Located 750 miles (1,200 kilometers) away from Vancouver, the Gitk'san territory is truly a place of plenty, so much so that the Gitk'san people consider that they live in Tda'im'lax'amid, or "situated on a nice place." The second area featured in the book is the Nuuchahnulth (formerly "Nootka") territory, which expands over 175 miles (300 kilometers) along the west coast of Vancouver Island. Nuuchahnulth means "all along the mountains and sea."

**WHERE PEOPLE FEAST** is co-authored by the mother-and-daughter team of Dolly (Watts) McRae and Annie Watts. Dolly is a descendant of a long line of high-ranking Chiefs (her Gitk'san Chief name is Lian, meaning "the down of an eagle"). Dolly has learned the customary ways to prepare and serve traditional foods at feasts, celebratory gatherings of indigenous peoples that are a major traditional component of many Native American cultures. Feasts are held to commemorate events such as births, deaths, or totem-pole raisings, during which people exchange gifts, dance, sing, re-enact stories, hear elders speak, and impart culinary knowledge to future generations; many beautiful sacred and ceremonial objects and dance regalia are used in these commemorations.

At the age of ten, Dolly left her family and moved to Port Alberni to attend an Indian residential school. There, she finished twelfth grade, and then got married to Thomas Watts, himself a descendant of a long line of high-ranking Chiefs (his Kwakiutl name is Negye, meaning "Mountain") and a member of the Tseshaht tribe, one of fourteen tribes that make up the Nuuchahnulth Nation. Dolly was given the Nuuchahnulth name Tuta'he'hlim—meaning "Voice of Thunder." While married, they had three children: Cynthia, Wallace, and Annie.

Through her parents and ancestors, Annie's heritage is truly diverse: she is (through her mother) Gitk'san and Scottish, and (through her father) Nuuchahnulth, Kwakiutl, Makah, and English. Before finishing secondary school, Annie worked as a waitress and became interested in becoming a chef. She received a Culinary Arts Degree from

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Malaspina College on Vancouver Island, and years later, became interested in obtaining a degree in Computer Science. Around the same time, Dolly moved to Vancouver and attended the University of British Columbia where she earned a Bachelor's degree in Anthropology. She was hired to be a tour guide at the Museum of Anthropology, located on the university grounds. One day, Dolly helped some Native students raise enough money for a field trip by preparing bannock which the students helped fry and then sell; they easily raised enough money to reach their goal. A professor suggested that Dolly set up a table outside the museum and sell bannock on a regular basis. Soon, customers began requesting that Dolly offer soup and salmon with the bannock, and the food cart ensued, which then evolved into a catering business. Dolly had to rent kitchens on the university campus to keep up with demand. Just as it was becoming necessary to find a permanent kitchen for her burgeoning business, a restaurant space became available downtown near Vancouver's busy English Bay, just two blocks from Stanley Park, which became home to their restaurant, Liliget Feast House, the world's only indigenous fine-dining establishment.

**WHERE PEOPLE FEAST** celebrates Dolly and Annie's twelve years spent running their restaurant ("Liliget" is a Gitk'san word meaning "where people feast"), which was designed by internationally renowned Canadian architect Arthur Erickson. Liliget emulated the interior of a traditional west coast longhouse, with subdued lighting illuminating wooden walkways across pebble floors, contemporary First Nations art on the walls, and long cedar-plank tables with tatami-style cedar-plank benches. Upon opening in 1995, the restaurant was an immediate hit. Annie planned all the menus, cooked part time, and designed all of the promotional materials, taking advantage of the international culinary knowledge she received from the renowned chef instructors while in college and the talented First Nations cooks of Liliget Feast House. Gaining culinary acclaim in Canada and beyond, Dolly won a food competition in Vancouver called the Gold Komochi Konbu Iron Chef Challenge, cooking alongside Japanese chefs on recipes that featured traditional spawn on kelp; she was also recognized with a National Aboriginal Achievement Award for business and commerce. Accolades for the restaurant included a four-star recommendation from the **NEW YORK TIMES**. **WHERE MAGAZINE** also voted it Vancouver's "Best Ethnic Cuisine," and Aboriginal Tourism BC awarded Liliget with

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the “Excellence in Customer Service” Award. The chefs of Liliget Feast House cooked over an alder wood-burning grill, preparing such mouth-watering dishes as Alder-Grilled Marinated Elk (page 16), Sweet Potato Tarts (page 89) with Savory Wild Blueberry Jam (page 171), and Sopalali Mousse (page 142) for dessert for local regulars, out-of-town tourists, and celebrities alike.

**WHERE PEOPLE FEAST** is a wide-ranging collection of traditional (and not-so-traditional) west coast aboriginal recipes. The first chapter, Wild Game, includes delectable entrées such as Venison Roast with Juniper Berry Rub (page 21), Rabbit Pot Pie (page 29), Chokeycherry-Glazed Grouse (page 40), and Wild Buffalo Burgers (page 27). The Seafood chapter showcases recipes for fish and shellfish that run the oceans and rivers of the Pacific Northwest Coast region: salmon, halibut, crab, oysters, clams, scallops, shrimp, and Alaskan Black Cod; oolichan, which populate British Columbia rivers by the millions; and the delicacy herring spawn on kelp. In the Vegetables, Salads & Sides chapter, you’ll find recipes for Alder-Grilled Butternut Squash (page 70), Blackberry-Glazed Beets (page 73), the Native interpretation of the classic Caesar salad called Caesar Goes Wild Salad (page 80), and numerous recipes for indigenous wild rice that grows across North America. The chapter Soups & Stocks cooks up mouth-watering soups, stews, chowders, and stocks that use ingredients such as salmon, buffalo, hominy corn, and shiitake mushrooms. Next, the Sauces & Condiments chapter shares Liliget Feast House’s special recipes for its popular Dill Sauce (page 125), Raspberry Cranberry Chutney (page 117), and Brown Mushroom Gravy (page 123). Baked Goods & Desserts provides Dolly’s claim to fame: Just Like Grandma’s Bannock (page 130), a traditional fried bread recipe, as well as many other delicious treats with a First Nations twist. And finally, **WHERE PEOPLE FEAST** concludes with a unique and insightful chapter, Smoked Foods & Preserves, which provides traditional methods and contemporary recipes for smoking and drying wild game and seafood and preserving berries.

In 2007, Dolly decided to retire and shut down Liliget Feast House to move back to Port Alberni and live with her new husband Ken McRae, who is currently the mayor of Port Alberni. Now that the restaurant has closed its doors, both Dolly and Annie are happy that its legacy can live on in this cookbook.

# Berry Picking

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A Story by Dolly Watts

I watched my older brothers and sisters get ready to pick berries on the mountain. "We're going to Sta'ghiy'it to pick berries," they whispered in our grandpa's ear. I watched Mom pack their food and blankets and I wished I could go. Two years has passed and it was that time again, time to pick berries.

I had turned seven that summer and I was big enough, I knew. "Please, Mom, I am big now and I will walk fast."

"But what if you get tired or scared when they tell stories at night?"

"I will pick lots of berries and I will go to sleep early, and I will do what Aunty says, and I won't listen to scary stories."

"Alright, get ready!" Mom bundled twelve dried fish and tucked them inside my grey wool blanket and strapped it tightly on my back. I told everyone I was going to Sta'ghiy'it to pick berries.

We climbed up Sta'ghiy'it where I knew shiny blackberries waited. I walked and sometimes ran beside Aunty, her big feet, long legs stepping once, mine twice.

Above, the trees were so high, their tips leaning to tell stories, while beneath my feet was moss and cedar, crimson and soft.

The animals and birds squawked and groaned, male grouse wooed, bears ran, and startled mountain sheep did not transform into humans.

We reached first camp where a lean-to stood waiting to be covered with cedar boughs, and on the ground was blackened wood where a fire once burned.

I undid my bundle and we roasted fish. Hot fat dripped down my chin as I ate. I drank sweet, hot, cedar-flavored tea. The cold mountain air enveloped us, my blanket was wrapped around me, and I watched the flames reach high into the sky as the storytellers' shadows danced while they told stories. I closed my eyes, thinking of huckleberries.