



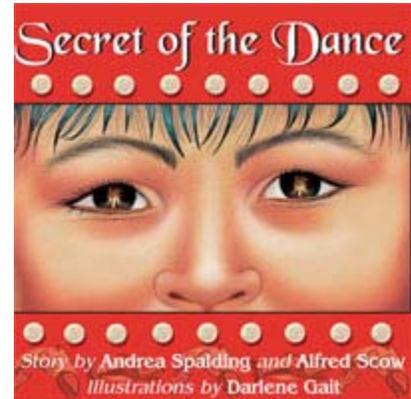
Secret of the Dance
Story by Andrea Spalding and Alfred Scow
Illustrations by Darlene Gait

ORCA BOOK PUBLISHERS

1-800-210-5277
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Interest Level: Ages 4-8
9781551433967



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Book Summary

"Many years ago, when the world and I were younger, my family defied the government."

In 1935, a nine-year-old boy's family held a forbidden Potlatch in faraway Kingcome Inlet. Wat'l'kina slipped from his bed to bear witness. In the Big House masked figures danced by firelight to the beat of the drum. And there, he saw a figure he knew. Aboriginal elder Alfred Scow and award-winning author Andrea Spalding collaborate to tell the story, to tell the secret of the dance.

Author/Illustrator Biography

Award-winning author **Andrea Spalding** has written many popular books for children, including *Solomon's Tree*, which was the First Nation Communities Read 2004 Book of the Year. **Judge Alfred Scow**, elder of the Kwakwa'wakw Nation, is a member of the Order of Canada. Now retired, Judge Scow and his wife live on Pender Island and in Vancouver. Andrea and her husband live on Pender Island, British Columbia.

Darlene Gait was born on Vancouver Island and began painting as a child. Inspired by nature and by her Coast Salish heritage, Darlene brings a rich understanding of the natural world to her work, which is held in private collections and exhibited world-wide. Darlene lives in Shawnigan Lake, British Columbia



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About the book:

The picture book *Secret of the Dance* is a fictionalized version of a real incident in the childhood of Kwakwa'ka'wakw elder Alfred Scow.

Alfred's family sailed from Gilford Island to isolated Kingcome inlet to attend a forbidden potlatch. His parents forbade him to attend so he wouldn't be apprehended if they were raided by the authorities. Alfred sneaked inside to watch and recognized the Hamatsa.

The episode happened over seventy years ago, and Alfred couldn't remember many of the details. He also realized that many implications of the event only became clear to him as an adult. Alfred and Andrea created fictional conversations and situations colored by authentic details from Alfred's childhood to tell the entire story from a child's point of view.

Reviews:

The Globe and Mail - September 9, 2006

"Powerful aboriginal images and symbols...are incorporated into almost all the acrylic paintings that illustrate this...fictionalized account of a signal event in the life of Alfred Scow...told in simple but evocative prose."

Booklist - October 1, 2006

"The child's view of brave adults in secret rebellion will even attract children somewhat older than the target audience..."

Horn Book - November 1, 2006

"...an innocent perspective on a powerful act of defiance...Gait's large-scale acrylic paintings reinforce the religious dimension, infusing magic realism into the landscape and story."

How Andrea became involved with the story

I dropped in for tea one morning with Joan and Alfred Scow in their home on Pender Island. As we chatted, Alfred mentioned his struggles to write his autobiography. He was getting bogged down by dates.

"Oh don't bother about the dates," I said breezily. "Get down the good stories and figure out the dates later. Tell me something interesting about your childhood."

The conversation flowed in and out of fascinating incidents: Alfred as a small boy helping his father on fish boats, his years in residential school, looking after his younger sisters. Then came the remark, "I sneaked into a potlatch once and saw my father dance for the first and last time."



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It was one short sentence, but the hairs on the back of my neck prickled. I heard a sudden flatness in Alfred's voice. The air seemed charged with hidden meaning and emotion.

I couldn't forget those words. They contained an enormous story! I longed to explore the idea but felt it was impossible. This incident was from Alfred's childhood. It spoke of a secret, deeply significant cultural event in a painful time. It was a story that didn't belong to me.

For several nights following that conversation I dreamed of that child in the fish boat. I woke each morning feeling the tension from the adults as they worried about the authorities finding them, and the excitement of the child not totally understanding but aware that something momentous was going on. I wondered how Alfred felt about the event.

The story haunted me for weeks. Each night I dreamed a little more. Each day I resisted the story. Then one morning I woke with an idea. What if Alfred and I pooled our expertise and worked on the story together?

I mentioned the idea of a children's picture book and he chuckled. He couldn't see how the incident would work as a story.

I wrote a rough first draft to demonstrate what might be possible.

"Would anyone be interested in something like that?" Alfred asked.

I assured him they would, but I couldn't do it. It was a fictionalized version of an incident in his life about his culture. It would only work if he was comfortable being part of it. Did he feel this incident was something he could share with Canadian children?

We worked on the manuscript of Secret of the Dance for three years.

It was an honor to learn from such a knowledgeable and dignified Elder. Working with Alfred has taught me a great deal and helped me come to terms with an aspect of Canadian history I find very discomforting and embarrassing. Oh, how I wish the Indian Agents were not from my culture.

But maybe this was why the story wouldn't go away. Maybe our two cultures working together in a positive way can help today's children understand the mistakes from the past and use the knowledge to make different choices in their future.

This journeying through story with Alfred Scow has been one of the highlights of my life.

Andrea Spalding, Pender Island, BC 2006



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Aboriginal Language

Several words in *Secret of the Dance* are in Kwak'wa'la, the language of the Kwakwa 'ka wakw Nations. Their meaning can be found in the glossary at the end of the story.

Kwak'wa'la was Alfred Scow's first language.

There are many Aboriginal Nations across Canada and each has its own language. The languages are as different from each other as English is from Chinese. Aboriginal children attending residential school were forbidden to speak their language of birth and forced to communicate in English, so many of these languages were in danger of being lost.

Now there is a resurgence of interest in Aboriginal languages. They are being taught to Aboriginal students in schools across Canada.

As these are complex languages without written alphabets, ways of writing the sounds have had to be devised for today's children. Much of the work on Kwak'wa'la has been done by Gloria Cranmer Webster in Alert Bay

Aboriginal Masks

When the Potlatch and other ceremonies were declared illegal, masks and other ceremonial objects were seized by government agents and traded or sold around the world. Only a few masks were successfully hidden and remained within the care of the original families.

Many confiscated mask have gradually found their way into museums and can be seen on public display. Others are in the hands of private collectors.

The people of Alert Bay successfully petitioned the Government of Canada and the National Museum of Canada for the return of their seized masks. This effort was spearheaded by Gloria Cranmer Webster, a daughter of hereditary Chief Dan Cranmer, the original owner of much of the seized material.

Now other First Nations are taking steps to repatriate their heritage from museums around the world.

Currently museums negotiate with the owners of the old masks and the carvers of new masks, to create displays.

In Canada, West Coast masks and other ceremonial carvings can be seen in the Vancouver Art Gallery, the Royal BC Museum in Victoria , the Museum of Anthropology at UBC, the Vancouver City Museum, the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto, and the National Museum of Civilization in Gatineau, Quebec.



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The Potlatch

Potlatch ceremonies are traditionally held by many of the Aboriginal Nations of British Columbia, but as each of the Nations is distinct, so the songs, stories and dances are different.

Even within a Nation, some songs, stories and dances can be performed only by certain families or individuals and are handed down through that family for generations. Aboriginal people own songs and stories. An owned song or story may only be performed either by its owner, or by someone who has been given formal permission to use it. Sometimes a song or dance is gifted to a member of another family.

Early collectors from museums didn't understand this concept and some songs and stories were stolen without the Aboriginal community's permission.

Alfred Scow's father was a member of a secret society within the Kwik'wa'sut'eneuk, and was entitled to dance the role of Hamatsa wearing birch bark rings. This was an important and coveted honor.

The masks used during ceremonies are also owned by families or individuals, and many of the designs on button blankets show family crests.

Alfred belongs to the bear clan and the bear design is on the back of his blanket. The shapes on the front of the blanket portray two copper shields and signify that he is a member of an important and influential family.

Other resources

Andrea Spalding has written two other books with Aboriginal themes.

- *Solomon's Tree* – a children's picture book illustrated by Janet Wilson in which a young Tsimpsian boy learns to carve a mask.
- *Finders Keepers* — a juvenile novel in which a cross-cultural friendship is threatened when Danny finds an arrowhead.

Andrea's website: www.andreaspalding.com

Darlene Gait has illustrated other books with First Nations themes.

Darlene's website: www.darlenegait.com

Most cities have Native Friendship Centers, many of which do outreach programs. There may be a small charge for these.

The National Film Board has a list of videos with Aboriginal themes that can be rented by schools.

Non-Fiction Reference Books currently available in libraries:



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Cole, Douglas & Chaikin. 1990. *An Iron Hand Upon the People. The Law Against the*

Potlatch on the Northwest Coast . Douglas & McIntyre. 230pp.

Converse, Cathy. 1998. *Mainstays. Women Who Shaped BC*. Horsdal & Schubart. 212p.

(pp. 53-62 about Gloria Cranmer Webster and her role in restoring artifacts).

Several books by Hilary Stewart have wonderful information on Northwest Coast art and traditions. All are published by Douglas and McIntyre: *Cedar, Looking at Northwest Coast Art, Looking at Totem Poles*.

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