LINDA THOMAS

WEENUK-LINDA SMOKED FISH – PORT ALBERNI, BC

In the heart of Indigenous culture, where tradition intertwines with the wisdom of generations, Linda Thomas has carved her path—a journey marked by family, hard work, and a deep reverence for her heritage. Born from the teachings of smoking fish and the invaluable lessons passed down by her elders, Linda's entrepreneurial endeavor is more than just a business venture; it's a tribute to her roots. "My company derives from my uproot teachings of smoking fish and all of the hereditary teachings from our elders," Linda shares, speaking of her company, Weenuk-Linda Smoked Fish. "I have to make sure that I've got a good product, the best product, and work with it and give the people what they want."

Linda explains that the barriers to accessing fresh fish are not having the necessary supplies and facilities, so she has chosen to provide canned and smoked fish for her community. During her lifetime, Linda is proud to have taught her siblings, brothers, sisters, and grandchildren, "...to show them what all our history is about, what our food is all about."

Linda's story is one of resilience and determination, rooted in the teachings of her parents and the legacy of her late grandfather, Alec Thomas. "My greatest teachers were my mom and my dad," she reflects, acknowledging the pivotal role her parents played in shaping her journey. Yet, she also pays homage to her late grandfather, whose efforts secured fishing rights for their community. "Without him, we wouldn't have the fishing rights in our river," Linda asserts, "He stayed there until the papers were signed and he came home. And our fisheries have not stopped since."

With each slice of the knife Linda meticulously prepares each fish according to the time-honored techniques passed down through generations. "It cannot be too thick, and it can't be too thin," she explains, emphasizing the importance of perfection in every cut—a testament to her dedication to delivering the finest product, crafted with care and respect. She works tirelessly to be proud of the product she provides and to put out the best product she can.

When thinking of a perfect world for Indigenous women, Linda encourages them to be proud of who they are and the teachings they have received. "Pass it on, be respectful, always know that there's room to teach, learn, give. You respect who you are and teach the younger ones."

In a world where access to resources remains limited, she relies on her unwavering commitment to her craft and the support of organizations like the Native Fishing Association to navigate the complexities of entrepreneurship. Speaking of the women she met at the workshop in Campbell River she states, "They don't have to teach me, they show me. They've taught me so much over a lot of the years. And it's very important that we do it right." As Linda tends to her smokehouse, packing each preserved fish with care, she embodies the spirit of her heritage. Through her work, Linda not only preserves tradition but also inspires future generations to honour their culture and embrace their heritage.

Linda's advice for young girls today is this, "If you want to learn what I am doing, it's okay to use your own ways, it doesn't have to be the same as mine. I always say we all have our own way. Do what you can but be ready to work hard. You can't just do it partway." She strives to instill a hard-working spirit within the girls and women who come after her. In her hands, tradition finds new life, and the legacy of her ancestors continues to thrive—a testament to the timeless power of culture, perseverance, and respect. "I really take pride in doing the best that I can."

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