“Honouring Khot-La-Cha”
Circa 1992

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We are here this evening to honour – KHOT-LA-CHA: Man with a kind heart, Dr. Chief Simon Baker.

Simon was born on January 13, 1911 on the Capilano Reserve. His parents were Jack and Susan Baker. His mother, Susan, was the daughter of Chief Joe Capilano and Mary Capilano. Simon was raised by his grandmother, Mary Capilano, who was known as the Princess of Peace. She lived to be over 100 years old. She died in 1942. Simon was greatly influenced by his grandmother. After Simon returned from St. George’s Residential School in Lytton, he asked his grandmother if he could go to a white man’s school for more education. She told him, “I don’t want you to go to white man’s school because I have been teaching you our ways of living and I want you to be a leader of our people – of our family here on Capilano Reserve.”

As we all know...Simon did become and still is the leader she wanted him to be. The Sechelt People said it best when they described Simon as “an ambassador of his own culture and of the human spirit.”

That is the theme of the book I’m working on with Simon. It is a story of his life told in his own words. Khot-La-Cha: Man with a kind heart – watch for this book in the bookstores next fall. It will be published by Douglas and McIntyre. All royalties from this book will go to establish the Knot-La-Cha scholarship fund for the UBC First Nations students. So for xmas 1994 – buy a whole bunch.

I’ll tell you a bit about what you’ll find in the book:
1911-1918 – Growing up on the Capilano Reserve – tells about his grandmother, his parents, his brothers and sisters and North Vancouver.
1918-1926 – St. George’s Residential School in Lytton, his leadership becomes apparent. He teaches other boys to swim, play various sports, games, carving. He organized a strike: “We work like men we eat like men!” He courted kitchen girls.
1926-1934 – Sowed his wild oats, hop-picking, fishing, long shoring, living around, learning the ropes, dancing in ballrooms in Vancouver. “I never picked up any girls. They were nice girls but somehow, I just went there to dance.” Can you believe that? I need more juicy stories about those days.
Emily put a stop to all that on June 7, 1934 when they were married. She was Emily Rivers. It was a small wedding with Emily’s school chum Gertie Ettershank (Guerin) as her bridesmaid and Simon’s first cousin, the late Tim Moody, was the best man. All Simon had to give his bride was lots of love. Emily had to buy the wedding ring. After the ceremony, they drove around in Pete’s car (Emily’s brother). Emily had packed her bridal overnight bag expecting to go to some nice hotel. At 1 A.M., they were still driving around and Emily was getting tired. Simon finally had to admit he hadn’t reserved a hotel room. So Gertie said they could go to her place and have her bed. Gertie lived just two doors away from Emily.

The honeymoon was equally exciting. They headed for Prince Rupert where Simon planned to go fishing and Emily was going to work in the cannery. They left Vancouver with Ed and Rose Sparrow (Wendy’s grandparents), their five small children on a 32 foot fishing boat. So the honeymoon suite on this first ever love boat was on the deck between two 45 gallon drums of gas and the stern of the boat.

Their first home was a cabin in Prince Rupert which had two single beds. I’d say they had the cards stacked against them. At any rate, the end result as of today is that they have: 9 children, 32 grandchildren and 21 great-grandchildren.

On June 7, 1994, they will celebrate their 60th wedding anniversary. On their 50th anniversary, Simon gave Emily a $2000 gold bracelet to make up for her having to buy her own wedding ring. I wonder how he can top that for his 60th? Emily name your price!

As you all know, there is much more to Simon’s life: his many years as a long shore’s man – working his way up to superintendent; his work with the Squamish Band (chief, councillor, band manager); his ambassadorship (NWICS, C.Ind. Community Club, FNHL); world expositions (he travels throughout the world); his awards, distinctions and recognitions. His latest being “Distinguished Senior of the Year” award by Brock House Society; his eldership and his love of sports.

Simon is a wonderful human being. He is truly an ambassador of his own culture and of the human spirit. He promotes friendship, goodwill, mutual respect and understanding among all peoples.

I salute you: Knot-La-Cha and your dear wife Emily.