

JIGGING ^{FOR}
HALIBUT
WITH TSINII

SARA FLORENCE DAVIDSON

ROBERT DAVIDSON

ILLUSTRATED BY JANINE GIBBONS



For the Elders who have always shown us the way

— SFD & RD

To the matriarchs that speak to me most loudly when I'm standing alone on the shore breathing in the fresh ocean air... Jenny St. Clair, Margarite Hamilton, Helen Rustanius Todd, and my beautiful mom, Newborn Eagle Woman: Guud Jaada, Jackie Tyson

— JG

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We acknowledge the support of the Canada Council for the Arts.
Nous remercions le Conseil des arts du Canada de son soutien.

HighWater Press gratefully acknowledges the financial support of the Province of Manitoba through the Department of Sport, Culture and Heritage and the Manitoba Book Publishing Tax Credit, and the Government of Canada through the Canada Book Fund (CBF), for our publishing activities.

HighWater Press is an imprint of Portage & Main Press.

Design by Jennifer Lum

Cover Art by Janine Gibbons

Map by John Broadhead

Library and Archives Canada Cataloguing in Publication

Title: Jigging for halibut with Tsinii / by Sara Florence Davidson and Robert Davidson ; illustrated by Janine Gibbons. Names: Davidson, Sara Florence, 1973- author. | Davidson, Robert, 1946- author. | Gibbons, Janine, illustrator.

Description: Series statement: Sk'ad'a ; 1 Identifiers: Canadiana (print) 20200399764 | Canadiana (ebook) 20200411071 | ISBN 9781553799818 (hardcover) | ISBN 9781553799825 (EPUB) | ISBN 9781553799832 (PDF) Subjects: LCSH: Intergenerational relations—Juvenile literature. | LCSH: Experiential learning—Juvenile literature. | LCSH: Indigenous peoples—British Columbia—Haida Gwaii—Social life and customs—Juvenile literature. | LCSH: Halibut fishing—Juvenile literature. | LCSH: Jigs (Fishing lures)—Juvenile literature.

Classification: LCC HM726 .D38 2021 | DDC j306.4/2—dc23



www.highwaterpress.com

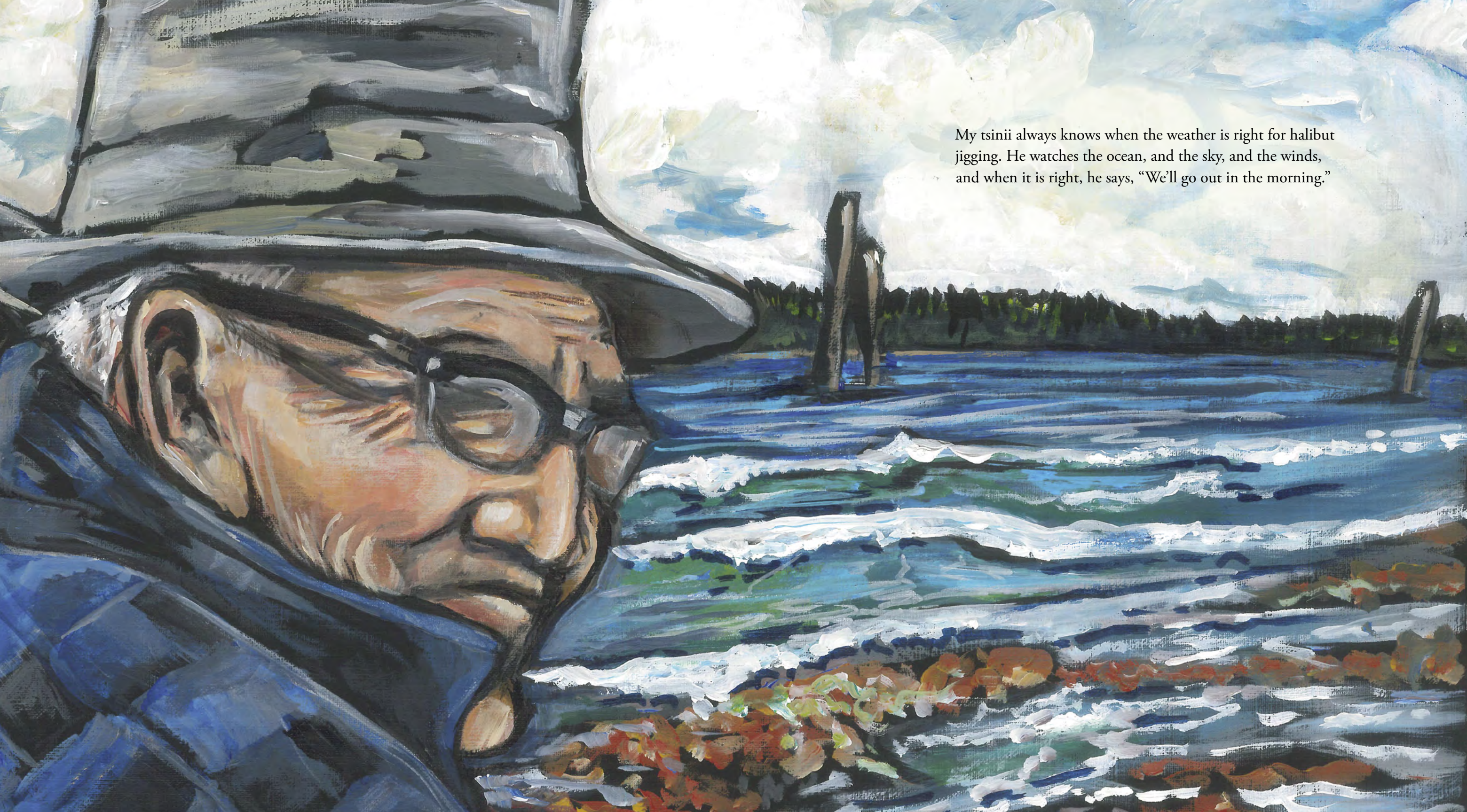
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JIGGING FOR HALIBUT WITH TSINII

SARA FLORENCE DAVIDSON | ROBERT DAVIDSON | JANINE GIBBONS






My tsinii always knows when the weather is right for halibut jigging. He watches the ocean, and the sky, and the winds, and when it is right, he says, "We'll go out in the morning."



When morning comes, we push off the beach
in a dinghy that he built, and row into the inlet.
We always row with the tide.

Tsinii sits on a board across the gunnel and
rows forward in the way of the Elders. I sit
facing him on the bench and row backward,
my back toward the bow of the boat.

An oil painting depicting two hands, one on the left and one on the right, firmly gripping the wooden handles of oars. The hands are rendered with visible brushstrokes, showing skin tones and shadows. The oars are dark wood with lighter, textured sections. The background is a bright blue sky filled with soft, white, billowing clouds. In the lower center, a seagull is shown in flight, its wings spread wide, with detailed feathering. The overall style is expressive and textured, characteristic of oil painting.


My hands grip the wooden oars that he made,
and we make our way down the inlet.

The wood knocks gently against the metal
locks in a steady rhythm.

We row for an hour
or so in silence.

My tsinii's eyes are old, and he cannot see as well as he used to, but he carefully watches the land. The rise of Tow Hill and the rocks of Wiia Point guide him to the halibut bank, better than my young eyes can.



A painting depicting a hand holding a large, multi-colored shell. The hand is rendered in shades of pink, red, and brown, with visible fingernails. The shell is the central focus, featuring a mix of white, blue, yellow, and brown tones. It rests on a mat made of thick, braided rope in white and light brown. The background consists of dark, textured wooden planks, likely the interior of a boat, with several brass-colored rivets or bolts visible. The overall style is expressive and textured, with visible brushstrokes.

Eventually, Tsinii stops rowing and says,
“Okay, we’ll fish here.” He does not
speak much English, so I know this
means to put the anchor down.

I lift it up and heave it over
the edge of the boat.

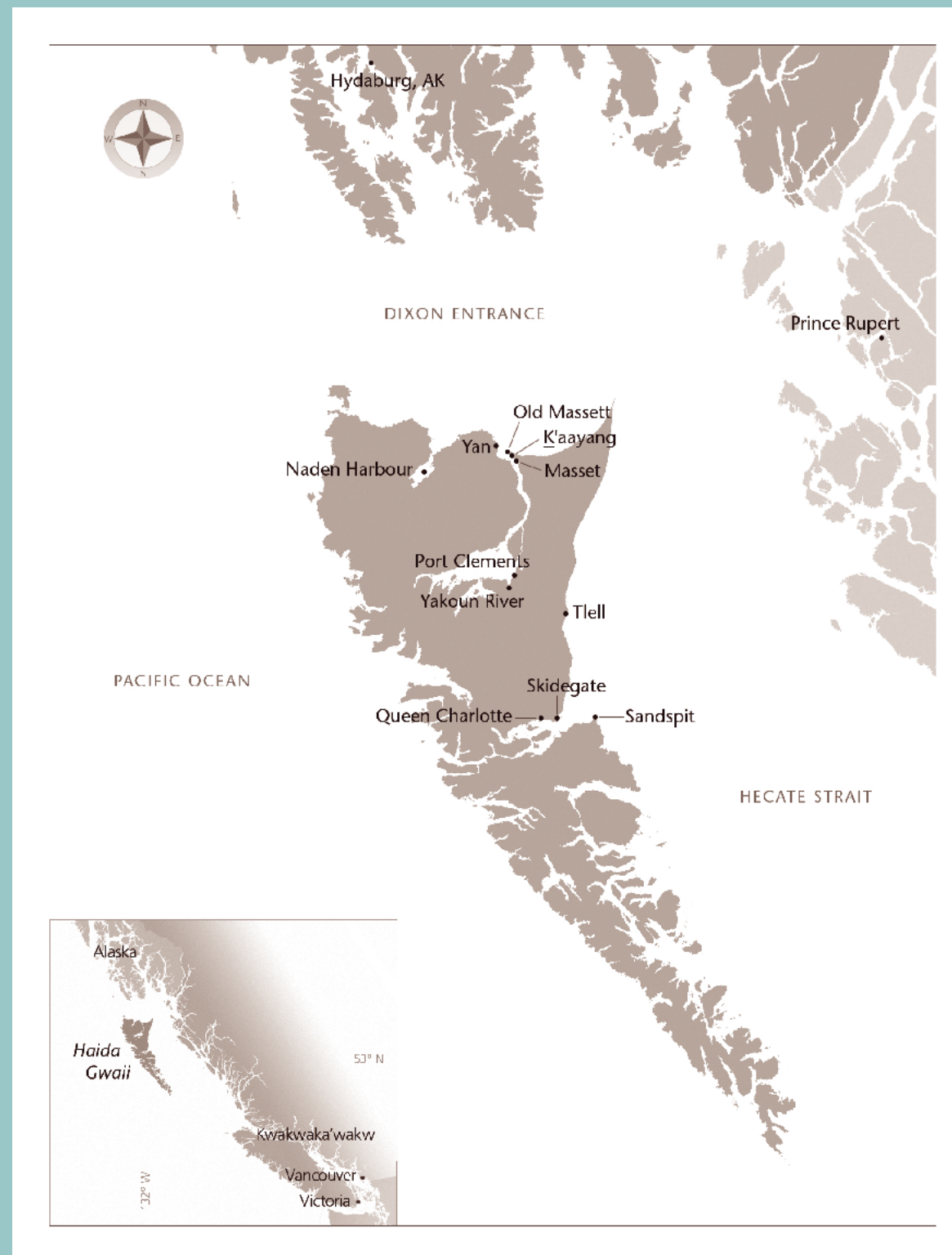
ABOUT THIS STORY

This story is based on real people and events. Sara and Robert talked about Robert's childhood memories of his tsinii. Sara used the information to create an imagined day of her father and his tsinii jigging for halibut.

ROBERT DAVIDSON SR.

gannyaa
1880–1969

The tsinii (grandfather) in this story is Robert Davidson Sr. He was a respected man of the Ts'aahl (Eagle) Clan in Old Massett. He was a skilled carpenter and helped build the local Anglican Church in 1919, designed and built his own houses, and was commissioned to build two traditional Haida canoes with his brother. He also built wooden seine boats including one called *Davidson Girl*. He was also a commercial fisherman, and he took up argillite carving in his later years. In 1969, he helped guide his grandson, Robert Davidson Jr. (author) on his pole raising in Old Massett. Robert Davidson Sr. was also considered a keeper of the songs and shared much of this knowledge with Elders and community members in preparation for the pole raising. He was married to Florence Edenshaw Davidson, and they had 14 children together. Today, there are over 100 people from the village of Old Massett who are their direct descendants.





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ISBN 978-1-77492-024-4



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