

Dennis Allen

Skokomish, Coast Salish

Dennis Allen is a member of the Skokomish (Twana) Tribe. He was born in Shelton, Washington in 1935. He is the son of William Allen and Rosie Pulsifer (Allen). His Grandfather Henry Allen was one of the last carvers on the Skokomish Reservation, and was also one of the major informants for an extensive anthropology study of the Twana (Skokomish) people.

Dennis has lived on the Skokomish Reservation almost all of his life. At the age of seven his mother died, and he went to live with his Aunt for three years. Then he was sent to boarding school for a year. At the age of eleven he returned to the Skokomish Reservation to live with his Grandmother Katie Pulsifer. His Grandmother was blind, so he took on the role of being her provider and caregiver. At an early age he learned how to hunt and fish, not only to provide food for himself and his Grandmother, he also learned how to give to other community members in need. While living with his Grandmother, he was exposed to his culture in every aspect. He was made to make baskets with different elders, prepare traditional foods, gather materials and medicines, listen to legends, and take part in canoe carving. He was also raised around a community member who built boats, which entailed steaming wood. This was his first encounter with bending wood.

Throughout his adult life, Dennis was a logger and a fisherman, until he decided to become an artist. For years he watched his son Andy Wilbur carve and paint, thinking he personally would never be able to accomplish making such beautiful art. As time passed, he watched Andy teach his wife Ruth and his daughter Andrea how to create Native American Art in many different forms, and Dennis became inspired to try some various graphic designs. So Andy showed him a few different designs, and he took them home and worked on them and made some changes and brought them back to show Andy. At that point he decided to learn how to make steam-bent boxes and drums and started drawing on designs and painting them. After getting comfortable with the different design forms, he decided to expand his art career and start carving. Dennis has won awards on his different art pieces, and has his artwork featured in galleries in several different States. He has developed his own style to coincide with the many legends that have been passed down to him. He creates from his heart, and enjoys every piece that he creates. He looks forward to expanding his career in many different mediums and dimensions. He continues to be an active community member and feels honored to take part in the revival of the Salish Art.

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